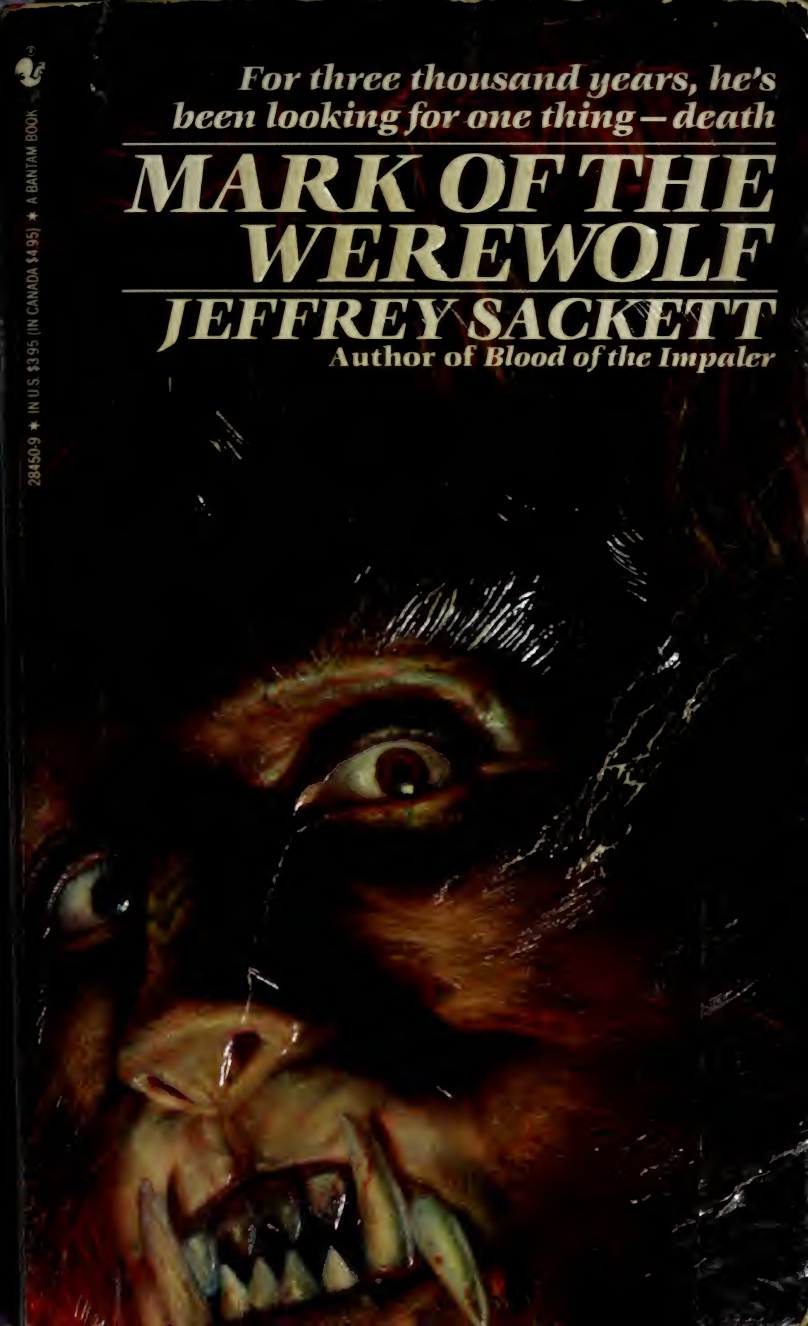
For three thousand years, he's been looking for one thing—death

MARK OF THE WEREWOLF

JEFFREY SACKETT
Author of *Blood of the Impaler*

28450-9 ★ IN U.S. $3.95 (IN CANADA $4.95) ★ A BANTAM BOOK



N 0-553-28450-9>>395

IN A KILLING FRENZY

The troops opened fire from all sides. Blasko, the gypsy, tried to shrink down close to the ground as the bullets whistled all around him. The burning lead struck the werewolf in the back, in the chest, on the arms and legs, the face and head—and ricocheted impotently away . . .

The creature reached up at the young man next to Blasko and grabbed him by the arm, pulling him downward. He screamed as his grip on the branch weakened, and he fell a few feet before the creature caught him with its jaws, holding his neck in its teeth. The werewolf crushed the man's spinal cord between its powerful fangs and dropped the shuddering body to the forest floor. Then the creature remembered Blasko. It turned to the helpless gypsy, the motionless prey . . .

WITHDRAWN
No longer the property of the
Boston Public Library.
Sale of this material benefited the Library.

MARK OF THE WEREWOLF

Jeffrey Sackett

BANTAM BOOKS
NEW YORK • TORONTO • LONDON • SYDNEY • AUCKLAND

A Bantam Book / February 1990

All rights reserved.
Copyright © 1990 by Jeffrey Sackett.
Cover art copyright © 1990 by Steve Assel.
No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.
For information address: Bantam Books.

ISBN 0-553-28450-9
Published simultaneously in the United States and Canada

Bantam Books are published by Bantam Books, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc. Its trademark, consisting of the words "Bantam Books" and the portrayal of a rooster, is Registered in U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and in other countries, Marca Registrada. Bantam Books, 666 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10103.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

OPM 0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

#3-9999-01852-0427

This book is for Kenneth Craigo,
with whom I have shared more cheap
wine, watched more bad horror movies,
engaged in more arcane conversations,
and more thoroughly enjoyed them all,
than with anyone else I have ever known.

Author's Note

Let me begin by saying that this book is basically a horror story; but like most of the horror stories I write, it contains elements of historical fantasy, which is what this author's note is mostly about. If you are interested in the horror and not the historical fantasy, you can skip the rest of this page and the next without suffering any great loss.

I am quite certain that the reader is familiar with the well-known nonsense about an Aryan master race which Hitler and the Nazis took so seriously, and I feel no need either to summarize the idea or to point out its foolishness. However, it may come as a surprise to some readers to learn that in the distant past there was indeed a people who were called the Aryans. It was this people whose invasions and conquests laid the foundations of the subsequent civilizations of Doric Greece, Vedic India, and ancient Persia. ("Iran," of course, is a name derived from "Aryan.") About the Aryans very little is known, though it is certain that the language groups known as Indo-European, and including most of the languages spoken from Portugal to Bangladesh, are descended from the ancient Aryan language.

The reader may also be surprised to learn that the swastika was an ancient Aryan symbol (which is, of course, precisely why the Nazis used it). The swastika can still be found carved on the walls of temples in India and in certain Buddhist countries. In those parts of the "Aryan world" (using the term correctly, let me emphasize) which never fell under the sway of the Nazi empire, the swastika does not have the rather sinister connotations which it has for most of the rest of the world. In such cultures it remains the religious symbol it originally was.

My use of a Lutheran clergyman as a major and not particularly

admirable character may cause some readers to assume that I am attempting to be disrespectful to that Christian communion. Nothing could be further from the truth. For one thing, I am a Lutheran myself (albeit a somewhat heterodox one). For another, my plot required a married clergyman, and I figured that the denomination I was raised in would do as well as any other.

The date of the prophet Zoroaster has never been agreed upon by scholars. The dates proposed range from 700 B.C. to 4000 B.C. My choice for his historical period is therefore arbitrary.

I wish to extend a word of thanks to Justin Aquaviva for his research assistance.

There are many people even today who firmly believe in the idea of superior and inferior races. I do not propose to waste paper and ink refuting such an absurd assertion, instead contenting myself with reminding the reader that there are also people who believe that the spirit of Elvis Presley is guiding their destinies, that Charles Manson was framed by the FBI, and that the pyramids at Giza were homing beacons built by intelligent lizards from Alpha Centauri.

J.S.

Weil es weder sicher noch geraten ist,
etwas gegen sein Gewissen zu tun.
(For it is neither safe nor right to do
anything against one's conscience.)

—MARTIN LUTHER

I will speak thus of the two spirits at the first beginning of the world, of whom the holier spake thus to the enemy, "Neither thoughts nor teachings nor wills nor beliefs nor words nor deeds nor selves nor souls of us two agree." I will speak of those who adhere to the enemy, of whom it is said that their own souls and their own selves shall torment them when they come to the Bridge of the Separator. To all time shall they be as prisoners in the House of the Lie.

—FROM THE *Avesta*

. . . And all the world wondered after the Beast, and they worshiped the Dragon which gave power to the Beast, and they worshiped the Beast, saying, Who is like unto the Beast, and who can make war with him?

—Revelation 13: 3–4

PROLOGUE

The cold wind whipped through the naked trees, and the old woman pulled her heavy woolen shawl tight around her throat. Cold such as this was not new to her; she had spent the better part of her long life wandering through lands of harsh weather, and the biting cold of the bitter winds of the late North Dakota autumn was as an old friend to her. But the years were beginning to tell, and she was no longer able to bare herself to the elements with the abandon of youth. There had been a time when she would have thought nothing of dancing half-naked at this time of year, when their caravan made one of its frequent visits to the local towns. The cold would not have stopped her from enticing the farmers to toss a few coins her way while her lover sneaked through the attentive crowd picking pockets; but she had ceased such activities years ago. Let the young girls dance while the old women read tea leaves and palms and assured the fools from the villages that their futures would be bright and prosperous and happy. It had always been thus, for longer than anyone could remember. The Gypsies moved from town to town, from region to region, even from country to country, dragging their meager possessions with them in their ramshackle vehicles, waiting for the time when the young girls could dance and the young men could pick pockets and purses, when the old women could tell fortunes and the old men could make music upon violin and mandolin and pipe.

Her own life was the age-old odyssey of her people in microcosm. Born eighty years ago in Central Hungary, she had fled to Russia to escape the terror of the Nazis, had gone from Stalin's Russia to Batista's Cuba to escape the terror of the Communists, and then decades later had fled from Cuba to the United States to escape the terror of Castro. Things were slightly different in this new land than they had been in the old world or on the warm southern island. Her people had aging cars and broken-down trailers instead of aging horses and broken-down wagons; but in most

other respects, things remained the same as they had been for the Gypsies for hundreds of years, the only real difference being that when hardship sank to desperation, they could not kill and eat their cars.

Theirs was a hard life, the old woman reflected as she tossed a few more handfuls of acorns into the pot of boiling water that rested on the blazing fire in front of her. They lived from day to day, from hand to mouth, boiling in the summer, freezing in the winter, making do with whatever food they could manage to purchase or find or steal. The fools in the villages seemed almost to envy the Gypsies their freedom, their apparent lack of responsibility. Freedom! the old woman thought to herself, snorting with irritation. Freedom to do what? Freedom to starve? Freedom to live without a home, without land, without the protection of the law? Freedom to fear each small-town policeman and each cruel young thug? Freedom! Bah!

She shivered. The warmth of the fire did little to comfort her, and it was as if she were half-burning and half-freezing as the fire roasted her face and the bitter cold assaulted her back. She dipped the old iron ladle into the caldron and drew forth a small portion of the steaming brown liquid. She brought it to her lips and sipped it cautiously. It was bitter and salty, just as it should be. The stew was almost ready, as ready, at least, as it would ever be. Just so much could be done with squirrel meat, acorns, water, and salt. As the old woman spit a generous mouthful of tobacco juice at the burning logs and watched it sizzle, she shook her head and sighed, wondering why the people who lived in the villages and the cities would begrudge her people their precarious existence.

And now there were even greater dangers, she thought. She was illiterate and oddly isolated in her incessant nomadism, and was thus only dimly aware of the events in the world outside her little tribe and their caravan, but she knew that something called a "recession" had occurred, and that the farmers of North Dakota had fallen on hard times. (As if they know what hard times really are! she thought bitterly.) She knew that groups of violent young people were blaming all their country's problems on her people, the Romany people, whom the Americans called "Gypsies," and on other people of whom she knew little, Jews and blacks and Indians, and even on the people who spoke the liquid language she had heard during her sojourn in Cuba. Her little band had

already been assaulted by some of these young thugs. Old Grigor had been seriously injured by the attackers, and his granddaughter Miska had been raped. Such suffering, the old woman knew, was part of the heritage of her people. But why the Romany had been blamed for this mysterious "recession," and what her people had to do with the Jews, the blacks, the Indians, and the Hispanics—this she did not know.

She looked over at an old man leaning on the rear bumper of an automobile, changing a string on his mandolin, and she said, "Grigor. The stew is done. Tell Lara to serve it to the others." She picked up a battered metal dish and began to spoon a helping of the meal into it.

The old man watched her and asked, "Is that for Blasko?" She nodded her head as he shook his. "He should get his own food, Mother. Why should you be his servant?"

She threw him a quick, irritated glance. "Do you want to keep watch over Kaldy while Blasko eats?" The old man did not reply. "Do you know what night this is, and what time it is?" Again there was no reply. "No, I thought not," she muttered, and then repeated, "Tell Lara to serve the others."

Holding the steaming dish with both hands, the old woman walked slowly past the trailers and the score of cold, tired, hungry people. The two campfires that had been built were giving forth enough light to dispel the murkiness of the impending sunset, but she walked out into the rapidly darkening forest that surrounded the clearing. She walked along a dirt road, one just wide enough to admit motorized vehicles, but also narrow enough to discourage the entry of anyone not seeking to hide in the woods, as the Gypsies were doing, as the Gypsies had always done. The once-bright colors of her long woolen skirt had faded away years ago, along with the roses in her cheeks, and she was now a gray shadow moving through the woods. She heard the jangling of chains nearby and turned in the direction of the sound. "Blasko?" she called out into the dusky haze. "Where are you?"

"We are here, Mother," a voice responded.

She squinted her old, myopic eyes and peered into the deepening gloom. She snorted with disapproval at the sight that presented itself to her. The man to whom she had called out, the man named Blasko, was wiping from his wrinkled brow the sweat covering it despite the bitter cold. In his hand he held some heavy chains

and was uncoiling them as he said, "Hello, Mother." Another man stood close to Blasko, a younger man, his hands folded calmly in front of him, his sad eyes gazing vacantly off at nothing. The old woman knew that Blasko had been preparing to bind the other man and that the other man had stood there calmly, awaiting the restraint. From the pocket of Blasko's dusty trousers protruded a few flowering twigs.

"You are behind your time, Blasko," she said. "The sun is almost down."

"I know, Mother," Blasko said. "There is time. You have no need to fear."

"I'm not afraid, not of him!" she spit, nodding at the other man with an expression of contemptuous dismissal she did not truly feel. "If I fear anything, I fear for you, not for myself. I have lived long enough."

Blasko laughed. "And you will live longer yet, Mother. I often think that you are immortal!" She was by far the oldest person in the Gypsy band, and was thus addressed as "Mother" by everyone, even though none of the twelve children to whom she had given birth were still living. Indeed, Blasko was merely being respectful in addressing her thus, for he was but ten years her junior.

She returned his gentle laughter with a shrill, brittle cackle that seemed to shoot forth from her toothless mouth. "I have survived for more years than I care to remember, Blasko. And immortality does not attract me." She walked forward and smiled maliciously into the face of the other man. "What do you think, friend Kaldy? Is immortality all that people think it is?"

The other man did not respond. Indeed, from the blankness of his expression it might almost seem that she had not spoken to him at all. Blasko regarded the old woman with a cautious, rather respectful disapproval. "Mother, please. Leave him be."

"I'd love to leave him be," she muttered, placing the dish of stew on the ground beside Blasko. "I'd love to leave him here and go on our way without him. I don't know why you seem to feel that you have to—"

"Mother . . ." Blasko began, and then smiled. "Thank you for the food." She recognized his thanks as the dismissal it was intended to be and turned to walk back toward the camp. She was about to mutter a parting criticism when the sound of gunfire

shattered the dusk, followed by screams and cries of fear mingled with shouted orders and cruel laughter in the nearby Gypsy camp. The old woman seemed to fly through the forest back toward her people, as if her absence were somehow related to what was happening, as if her presence would somehow serve to protect the others. Blasko followed her after a few moments—they were his people too, after all—and after an even longer hesitation, the other man, the one whom the old woman had addressed as Kaldy, followed after him.

The shouts grew louder as they drew closer to the camp, and the old woman drew in her breath loudly, fearfully, as she saw the reason for the commotion. She was not so learned in the ways of the world that she could identify by their manner of dress the people who had invaded the camp, but by the flickering firelight and the dying rays of the sun, some of the other, younger Gypsies saw them, knew what they were, and shuddered.

Two dozen muscular, heavily armed young men had surrounded the camp, young men whose heads were closely shaved and who were clad in black leather. Some wore earrings, others wore silver lightning bolts upon their collars, but all wore the same armband the old woman had seen so often in Europe so many years ago, the black swastika within the white circle upon the red field. Her alarmed confusion gave way to unmitigated dread when she saw the old Nazi symbol. The presence of danger clamored through every fiber of her being. She had known danger all her life—the danger known only to those who never rest, are never safe, never welcome, never truly home.

Blasko came up behind her and was soon joined by Kaldy. They stood and watched as the black-garbed young thugs herded the Gypsies into a circle near the fire and kept them motionless under their gun barrels as the old trailers were first searched and then set on fire. Blasko, Kaldy, and the old woman stood off to the side and watched, as if what was happening did not involve them. But then they were seen, and one of the invaders, a man nearing thirty and thus both the oldest of his company and their apparent leader, barked a few words to two of the others, who ushered the three stragglers into the circle with the tips of their gun barrels.

The frightened Gypsies whispered to each other in their ancient guttural tongue as the leader of the young men walked forward into the circle of captives and allowed his cold eyes to drift lazily

and with undisguised distaste over the assembly. He was a tall man, thin but muscular, with a cruel mouth set beneath an aquiline nose, his bearing and demeanor bespeaking confident arrogance as he placed his balled fists on his hips and shouted, "Shut your fuckin' mouths." Though few of the Gypsies understood him, his meaning was clear and they fell immediately silent. He smiled contentedly at their terrified obedience, and then asked, "Do any of you animals speak English?" He noticed that a few of the captive Gypsies were glancing furtively at one of the three who had been found lurking at the edge of the camp, and so the commander turned to him. "You! Do you speak English?"

Janos Kaldy looked at the young man with what seemed to be disinterest, a fact the latter found extremely irritating. "Answer me, pig, if you can. Do you speak English?"

Kaldy emitted an almost inaudible sigh and then replied in an unusual and somehow antique English, "I have some knowledge of the tongue."

"Good," the young man said sternly. "Then you're gonna be my translator for a while. Tell your people that they're gonna be coming with us, by order of the Commander of the White Homeland Party, the WHP." He paused and grinned slightly, reflected how nicely the initials WHP lent themselves to the nickname he and his comrades used for themselves—"whips." But the grin faded almost immediately, and he was suddenly once again stern and imperious. "Tell them that their days of stealing and spreading disease are over. Tell them that they're gonna cooperate and do what they're told. Tell them that we're gonna shoot anybody who gives us any trouble. Tell them that this applies to everybody, women and children as well as men, old people and young people both." He paused. "Go on, tell 'em!"

Kaldy sighed once again and then muttered a translation of the young man's words. A babble of frightened voices arose at once from the Gypsies, but silence was restored when the young man nodded curtly at one of his men and the latter released a few rounds of gunfire over the heads of the captives. "Tell them that we won't answer any questions and won't put up with any trouble," he said to Kaldy. "Tell them that they're gonna come with us to the trucks on the road at the edge of this forest and—"

"They ask no questions and they make no protests," Kaldy interrupted him. "They have a request."

The leader frowned. "Yeah? So what is it?"

"They want you to bind me with chains, and they want you to leave me here."

A stern look from the leader silenced the muffled laughter of his men. He turned back to Kaldy and, ignoring his words, said, "Because you can speak English, I'm gonna talk to these other animals through you. You're responsible for their behavior. If they resist or give us any problems, you're gonna pay for it. Do you understand me?"

Kaldy did not reply. He returned the leader's haughty gaze with an impassive one of his own. The leader felt slightly unnerved. He had expected to be met either with fear and intimidated obsequiousness or with violent resistance; but this Gypsy seemed unimpressed, unconcerned about his plight, not so much brave as bored. Making a promise to himself that he would make this bastard pay for his arrogance, the leader barked a few orders to the other young men, and the captives and their captors began to move from the clearing onto the narrow pathway through the woods.

The whip troops organized themselves without instruction from their leader, for in recent months they had gained a great deal of experience in kidnapping and transporting people. A single line moved through the forest, whips in back and front and interspersed through the line. Guns were drawn and held at the ready. Any Gypsy who attempted to break out of the line and flee into the woods would have been cut down in a matter of seconds. The Gypsies moved in terrified silence, and the only voices that broke the stillness of the darkening forest were those of the whips, the White Homeland Party soldiers, as they urged their captives to move along more quickly.

A half-hour passed before they reached the paved but deserted highway along the treeline. The dirt road that had afforded the Gypsies and their trailers and vans entrance into the presumed safety of the woods ended at the place where the large, reconditioned food-transport trucks stood waiting by the roadside. As the captives approached, they heard soft, frightened voices coming from three of the five trucks, and they realized that the whips had been kidnapping others that night. Two of the trucks were empty, and the small group of new prisoners was ushered into the last one. The fourth truck was apparently being used to transport most of the whips themselves.

The trucks used to ferry this human cargo were indistinguishable from tens of thousands of similar vehicles rolling across America's highways every day and every night. These five trucks, however, had been stolen and repainted and bore false license plates and spurious state stickers. The sides of two of the trucks proclaimed the virtues of Happy Bossy Dairy products, and the three others claimed to be the property of the P & G Brewery. The rear of each truck but the fourth was sealed by a heavy steel door and a sturdy padlock.

Kaldy, Blasko, and the old woman everyone called Mother were at the end of the line of captives, and when their turn came to climb into the truck, Blasko offered her his help. She shook her head vigorously and began to speak to him in angry tones.

The leader approached and told Kaldy, "Tell that old woman to shut her fuckin' mouth and get in the truck."

Kaldy smiled sadly at the old woman and then looked up at the sunless sky, at the first few stars beginning to appear. "She will not get into this truck if I am to get into it with her," he said softly. As if his words were a signal to the others of his band, one by one they began to dismount from the rear of the truck, timidly, but with nervous determination.

The whip leader smiled. He wagged his finger at the old woman to come forward. She hobbled over to him and began to jabber in her incomprehensible tongue. He listened to the sounds she was making for a few moments, then drew a revolver from his shoulder holster and put a bullet in her brain.

The Gypsies started at the crack of the shot and then watched silently as the old woman fell to the ground. Blood rushed out from the hole in her skull in a geyser, shooting a full yard into the air before subsiding into a steady but less forceful stream. The leader allowed them to watch for a few moments, allowed the point to be made and the lesson to be learned, and then, smiling coldly, motioned them back into the truck with the gun he still held in his unshaking hand. Slowly they complied. Blasko and Kaldy were the last two to enter the transport; then the heavy steel door was slammed shut behind them and locked tight.

The leader motioned to one of the other young whips to get the convoy under way, and then walked forward to the first truck and entered the cab as most of his men climbed into the back of the

fourth truck. He took a cigarette from his jacket pocket and lighted it as the trucks began to rumble down the road.

"Eddie," the young driver asked as the clouds ahead parted to reveal a brilliant full moon, "what's the captain gonna do with these people, anyway?"

"I'm not sure, Jack," the older whip replied. "All I know is that ever since that research place opened up last year, the captain's been sending out squads to pick up animals like these from all over the country."

Jack nodded, not entirely understanding, for he had only joined the WHP after getting out of prison a few weeks before. "I didn't know that there were Gypsies all over the country."

"Not just Gypsies," Eddie corrected him. "All sorts of sub-human scum. Niggers, spicks, kikes . . . any of 'em'll do just as well."

Jack nodded again. "But why does Captain Bracher want 'em? I mean, are we rounding 'em up to knock 'em off quiet?"

"Don't be stupid," Eddie snapped. "It'd take a hundred years to clean up the country that way, and we'd never get ahead of the game. These animals breed like lice, you know."

"So then, what are we—?"

"Look," Eddie cut him off, "we get our orders and we follow 'em, you know? I don't know what's goin' on at the Center, and I don't ask. We're soldiers, man, and we follow orders, just like the S.S. did in Germany."

Jack nodded happily. "Just like the S.S.," he repeated, deriving a thrill of pleasure from thinking himself somehow associated with the elite death squads that had visited such misery upon Germany and much of the rest of Europe more than a half-century before.

As the convoy rumbled through the dark North Dakota countryside, Janos Kaldy sat silently within the sealed rear of the last truck. The other Gypsies had withdrawn as far from him as they could manage in the limited space, and Blasko removed some flowering twigs from his pocket and held them out in front of him as if they were a shield.

Kaldy was not watching him. He sat motionless as the truck bumped along the uneven roadway, and then, some fifteen minutes after the last faint rays of the sun had been extinguished by the enveloping night, he sensed the coming of the change. He felt the

image of the beast billowing upward from within his own being, and his human consciousness turned itself inward and fled from its own inhuman spawn. Excruciating agony always accompanied the change, but consciously confronting the hideous darkness arising from within himself would have been inviting a madness and a torture too great for any mind to survive. Thus it was that at that moment, as so many times in the past, his consciousness sank into the void as the beast emerged. Then the agony struck him, and he began to scream; and as he screamed from pain, the other Gypsies screamed from terror.

Jack, the young whip who was driving the lead truck, glanced into the left-hand side mirror as the headlights of the rear truck began to flash on and off and its horn blared urgently. "Hey, Eddie," he said, "something's goin' on back there." Even as he spoke, he saw the rear truck grind to a halt on the side of the road.

Eddie looked into the right-hand mirror and said, "Slow down." His driver complied, and as the other trucks followed suit, Eddie muttered, "Shit. Those fuckin' Gypsies must be trying to escape. We better . . ." He paused, listening as a strange sound reached his ears from the rear of the convoy. "What was that?"

"What, Eddie?"

"Listen. You hear that?" He strained to listen for a moment, and a horrendous scream reached his ears. It was followed immediately by others, many, many others—screams so loud and bespeaking such abject terror that they startled him and left him momentarily confused. He turned to Jack and said, "Signal the others to stop." Eddie waited as the hand signal was given and the convoy came to a halt on the moonlit country road. He climbed down from the cab and walked back toward the other trucks, from which other young whips were already clambering down. "What the fuck's goin' on?" he asked.

"I don't know, Eddie," one of them replied. "I heard it too, coming—" His statement was cut off by an eruption of further frenzied screams from the rear of the convoy.

Eddie drew his revolver and walked quickly back toward the sound. The other whips followed, their guns likewise drawn, ready to teach the Gypsy scum a sorely needed lesson in obedience.

The screaming grew louder, and the last truck in the convoy

began to rock back and forth from the riotous agitation inside. Amid the screams came the sound of something crashing repeatedly against the interior of the heavy door, and as Eddie and his men reached the rear of the convoy the lock snapped in two and the door was thrust open.

A dark shape leapt out onto the pavement, and the whip leader opened fire on it. The shape, however, did not fall, did not recoil from the gunfire, seemed untouched by the bullets, which at so close a range could not possibly have missed. And then the shape began to run toward the whips, crouching over, almost but not quite on all fours. The approaching figure emitted a screech of hate-filled agony at the same moment that the bright light of the full moon enabled the whips to see the bristling fangs, which seemed so white against the hairy face, the moist black snout that flared menacingly beneath the burning yellow eyes, the long hirsute hands whose clawlike fingers ended in talons that were even now stretching out toward the whip leader.

All his men opened fire on the attacker. Bullets and buckshot thudded audibly as they struck the thing's body, but still it ran forward, screaming through its snapping fangs. The Gypsies in the rear truck jumped out onto the ground and ran in all directions, fleeing from the whips, but fleeing equally from the fiend that was even now attacking their captors. The creature's hands lashed out and decapitated two whips with its razorlike talons, and then, without breaking its stride, grabbed Eddie and bore him down to the ground. Eddie opened his mouth to scream, but the scream remained unuttered as the creature clamped its jaws tight on his throat and ripped it open.

The creature took but a second to swallow the bloody mass of flesh and cartilage and bone, and then it sprang to its feet and attacked the remaining whips. They continued to fire at it, they beat it with the butts of their guns, they stabbed at its hairy body with hunting knives and switchblades, but to no avail. The creature swept about them as a murderous whirlwind, disemboweling them, tearing into their throats, swallowing huge hunks of human flesh, and breaching the dark silence of the night with its agonized howls. The gunfire mingled with the shrieks of the dying and the roars of the creature, and the cold, hard ground on the shoulder of the road grew soft and slippery with blood.

In a very short time the whips were all dead, the Gypsies who had been in the truck with the creature had fled into the woods, and the creature itself had vanished into the darkness.

Only the old Gypsy Blasko remained standing on the dark road, surveying the destruction that surrounded him. He shook his head and sighed. Finally he went calmly over to what was left of the whip leader, Eddie, and rummaged through the dead man's pockets until he had found a ring of keys. He then went from truck to truck, opening the padlocks and releasing the whips' other kidnap victims, an assortment of blacks, Mexicans, and Indians. They questioned him and each other, but he did not reply and they could tell each other nothing. They had all heard the screams accompanying the carnage, and when they saw the remains of the massacre strewn about them, they followed the fleeing Gypsies and ran screaming into the night.

Blasko walked slowly and sadly over to one of the trucks and sat down on the running board of the cab. He rubbed his old, weary eyes and then took a pipe from his pocket. He stuffed it full of tobacco, lighted it, and then relaxed, puffing upon it languidly. Blasko knew that Kaldy would seek him out when the moon set, and so he would wait until morning, wait until sunrise, wait until Janos Kaldy returned, wait until Janos Kaldy was once again a human being.

He sat quietly in the darkness, his weathered face reflecting the red glow from the bowl of his pipe, listening to the distant cries of the lost soul who was his friend and his charge, his enemy and his burden. He reached into the pocket of his trousers and pulled out a few thin sprigs of the plant with wilted yellow flowers. Holding the wolfsbane pensively, Blasko smoked his pipe and waited for dawn.

I

THE WEREWOLF

Die Lust der Vernichtung
ist eine schaffende Lust.
(The passion for destruction
is a creative passion.)

—BAKUNIN

1

Jimmy Baumann was suffering from an absolutely terrible hangover, and the ringing of the telephone ripped through his forehead with the subtlety of a buzz saw. Felicia, the girl he had picked up the night before at Gallagher's bar in downtown Mannering, was still sleeping so soundly that even the blast of the telephone did not cause her to stir. He winced as he rolled to his left, leaned over Felicia's ample rump, and grabbed the receiver. "Yeah, whaddaya want?" he grumbled.

"Jimmy? That you?"

He rubbed his eyes and yawned before replying, "Who the hell else would it be? Who's this?"

"This is Dwayne, Jimmy. Listen, the captain—"

"What time is it?"

"Ten o'clock. Listen, Captain Bracher—"

"Ten o'clock!" Baumann shouted. "In the morning? What are you doin' callin' me up at ten o'clock in the morning? What the hell's the matter with you?"

"Jimmy, shut up and listen," Dwayne Briggs said on the other end of the line. "I have orders for you from Captain Bracher, for you and Lyle Hawkins."

Baumann's outrage at the disturbance of his besotted slumber dissipated at once. "Orders for me and Lyle? From Bracher directly?"

"Yeah," Briggs replied. "He liked the way you two handled those two guys a few days ago, the way you got them from the jail down in Bismarck over to the Center without any problems."

"That was a piece of cake," Baumann said, though he was glad of Captain Bracher's approval. "They didn't give us no trouble."

"The people he wants you to bring over today won't either," Briggs said. "Listen carefully . . ."

Baumann nodded intently as Briggs detailed the morning's mission. He wrote an address down on a scrap of paper before saying, "Okay, I got it. That all?"

Briggs paused. "Well, there is something else I have to arrange for tonight. Either of you guys know how to use a video camera?"

"Yeah, Lyle does, of course," Baumann replied. "Ain't you never seen none of his homemade porn?"

"No," Briggs snapped, "I haven't. I don't waste my time on such things."

Baumann laughed. " 'S'matter, Duh-wayne, don't you like girls?"

The implication of the question and the effeminate slurring of his name had the desired effect, and Baumann could almost see Briggs bristle on the other end of the line as he said, "Cut the shit, Baumann. Just find Lyle and carry out your orders. Briggs out." He slammed the phone down.

"Yeah, out of your fuckin' league, faggot," Baumann muttered into the dead receiver before putting it down. I'll never know why the captain picked that asshole as his adjutant, he thought, trying for the hundredth time to deny his envy and pretend that he merely disapproved of the captain's choice. "I'd have done a much better job," he muttered aloud. "Briggs couldn't fight his way out a gay bathhouse." He looked over at the round posterior being hugged by the dirty sheet and slapped it hard. "Come on, baby, rise and shine."

Felicia gasped as the sting of the slap awakened her, and she looked around with confusion through her tousled brown hair before focusing in on Baumann and asking, "What's going on?"

"You're getting dressed and going on your way," he said, grabbing her bra and dungarees from the floor and tossing them to her. "I gotta go to work."

The girl was tired and disoriented, and as sleep gave way to wakefulness she became aware of a pounding headache and a queasy stomach. "I feel like shit." She yawned. "What time is . . . ?" She paused. "Wait a minute, it's Sunday. Who goes to work on Sunday?"

"Okay, I lied. I'm going to church."

"Yeah, right," she mumbled, dropping her clothes back onto the floor and dropping her head back onto the pillow.

"Come on," he said gruffly. "Get dressed and get out! I got stuff to do today."

Baumann ignored her vulgar imprecations as he walked into the dirty, unpleasantly aromatic bathroom of the seedy little apartment and filled the rusty sink with water. He splashed some into his eyes, rubbed his face with a towel, and then swept his fingers through his short black hair, reflecting that one advantage to shaving one's head frequently was the elimination of any need to possess brushes or combs. Then he reached down to the shelf beneath the sink and took his revolver and holster from behind a roll of toilet paper. After making certain the gun was loaded, he tossed the holster back onto the shelf and put the gun itself into his belt against his right hip.

Baumann went back to the phone and dialed a number. The subsequent conversation he had with his friend Lyle Hawkins was similar to the one he had just had with Dwayne Briggs, though it was now Baumann on the receiving end of the anger and Hawkins who then listened carefully to the explanation of the morning's assignment.

Baumann donned a long black overcoat as Felicia finished dressing. He had never seen the girl before the previous evening and he had no expectation of ever seeing her again, so he felt no need to engage in any mundane courtesies. He left her standing at a bus stop in the cold of the morning as he drove his battered old Buick Century through the largely deserted streets of Mannering, North Dakota, on his way to collect Lyle Hawkins. He drove past the old, empty silos and the defunct factories, past the naked storefronts and the occasional groups of young men who even at this early hour and in this bitter cold were gathering on the street corners to pass the time by sharing each other's misery.

He had been one of them a year or so ago, lost, confused, unemployed and basically unemployable, his fear and alienation issuing forth in sporadic, directionless violence. As he glanced out the window at an ad hoc assembly of men in their twenties milling about in front of Harry's Diner, waiting for it to open so that they could commence the morning's activity of endless cups of coffee and endless chains of cigarettes, he almost pitied them.

They, unlike Jimmy Baumann, had never had the truth explained to them, had never been brought to an understanding of the whys and wherefores of the economic troubles that had shut down the factories, emptied the silos, and closed the stores. But Baumann knew and understood everything, and as he drove past them his knuckles grew white as his hands clenched the steering wheel. He shook his head in silent sympathy for his misguided brothers, and then muttered, "Goddamn fuckin' Jews," under his breath.

James Matthew Baumann was a White Homeland Party soldier, a whip. He was a young man with a purpose, with a racist religion, a creed of violence, an unswerving certainty born of an unshakable faith in the ultimate triumph of the white race, in the ultimate subjugation of the subhuman races—the blacks, the Hispanics, the East Asians, the American Indians. He looked forward to the inevitable and divinely mandated destruction of the filthy puppet masters who pulled the strings of these inferior races. He looked forward to the day when he and his comrades would finish the job Hitler had begun.

He saw Lyle Hawkins on the corner of Canyon and Third, hopping up and down in an attempt to mitigate the effects of the cold. It had not snowed yet this year, but the gray sky and the icy wind testified to winter's imminent arrival, and Hawkins had not shoplifted his annual winter clothing. The leather vest he wore scarcely protected his chest from the chill in the air, and he cupped his gloveless hands over his mouth and blew into them as he jumped in place.

Hawkins smiled with visible relief as the car pulled over to the curb. "Thank God!" he said as he slammed the door behind him. "I thought I was gonna die of frostbite!"

"It ain't that cold, Lyle."

"Cold enough," Hawkins insisted. "So who's this priest we gotta pick up?"

"A minister, not a priest," Baumann corrected him. "According to Dwayne, this guy is married to the captain's cousin, and he wants them both brought over to the Center this afternoon. Dwayne says the minister's last church service starts at eleven and probably ends about twelve-thirty, so I figure we can get to his church over in Endore in time to go to the service. It might make him a little less suspicious of us if he sees us in church before we start talking to him."

"And then what?" Hawkins asked, and then laughed. "I mean, are we supposed to ask them pretty-please to come with us?"

" 'Course not." Baumann reached over to the glove compartment, opened it, and took out a revolver. "Here. You carry this one. I got mine in my belt."

Hawkins grimaced. "So we're gonna shoot the captain's cousin? Are you nuts?"

"Don't be stupid, Lyle. We go in for the end of the service, shake hands with the guy as we're walking out, and ask him if we can talk to him privately, after everybody's gone. Then we pull the guns and force him to come with us."

"What if he won't talk to us privately?"

"He will. Ministers always do shit like that."

"Okay, I'll give it a go." He shrugged. "What about his wife, the captain's cousin?"

"Maybe she'll be in church too. Maybe not. We'll play it by ear."

"Yeah, okay." Hawkins paused to light a cigarette. "So what's this guy like?"

"Beats me," Baumann replied. "All I know is what Briggs told me, and I guess all he knows is what the captain told him. This minister and the captain's cousin are supposed to be missionaries or something. They're supposed to take a plane today to Africa, I think Briggs said. The captain wants them picked up before they leave."

"Missionaries!" Hawkins laughed. "The captain's cousin is a missionary? That's funny."

Baumann glanced at him. "Yeah? So next time you see the captain, tell him how funny you think his family is." Hawkins fell silent.

They continued on through the streets of Mannering and then took the state highway to the nearby town of Endore. The two young men were bound together by a common devotion to the Party, and both were in their early twenties, but they had few other similarities. Jimmy Baumann was a street-wise thug, tall and muscular, with cruel, narrow eyes and more than a hint of narcissism to his personality. Lyle Hawkins, on the other hand, was short and a bit paunchy, with a pockmarked face and small, delicate features. Baumann had been a street fighter since his early teens, and his transition from gang member to whip was really

little more than a shift of orientation. Hawkins had never been particularly physical, but the anger that simmered beneath his surface was all the more volatile for having rarely been released. A failure in school, rejected by girls in his adolescence, inept at sports, never accepted by any peer group, finding solace only in the arms of prostitutes and in dreams of vengeance, Hawkins had found a home in the WHP. When he first learned that his white skin and northern European ancestry made him a superior human, he lapped the idea up with all the pathetic intensity of a thirsty dog.

They entered Endore and drove through streets that evidenced the same economic distress as those of Mannering, with signs of unemployment and failed businesses on all sides. At last Baumann said, "That must be it." He nodded at a large brick-steel-and-glass building with an abstract cross atop a needlelike spire, and squinted to read the sign on the brown lawn. " 'Grace Lutheran Church. John Neville, Pastor,' " he read. "Yeah, this is the place."

"Do we really have to go to the service?" Hawkins asked. "I hate those things. My father always used to drag me to church when I was a kid."

Baumann punched him cheerfully in the arm. "Come on, Lyle, it'll be good for you!" Laughing, he exited the car. Hawkins followed after him, grumbling to himself as he put the gun in the side pocket of his dungarees. The edge of the grip was visible above the edge of the pocket, but he kept his arm down to hide it.

They walked into the church, smiled and nodded politely as the wary usher handed them each a copy of the Sunday bulletin, and then seated themselves in the rear pew.

As the two young whips sat and waited for the service to begin, Louisa Neville was leaning against the desk in the sacristy, smiling at her husband. "You know, John," she was saying, "I never really thought you would go through with this."

The Reverend John Neville, B.D., M.Div., Ph.D., and now M.D., was not paying attention to her. He was gazing into the mirror above the low bookcase. He adjusted his stole for the sixth time and then asked, "Hmmm? Did you say something, sweetheart?"

She appraised him with affection tinged with annoyance. He never seemed to listen to her when she spoke to him, as if he were forever thinking about something more important. It was true that his preoccupied intellectualism had been one of the things that first interested her in him a decade before, when she was an undergraduate in the deaconess program at the seminary and he was already an ordained minister working on his doctorate in theology; but eight years of marriage had turned his supposed profundity into an irritating tendency not to pay attention to people, his wife in particular. It was one of those abrasive little things that seem irrelevant during courtship, but which in marriage rub constantly against what was once a minor sore.

Still, she knew it was a minor fault, and now as always she did her best to ignore it as she laughed softly and repeated, "Yes. I said I never thought we were ever going to leave America and go to a foreign mission. I've always had the suspicion that the medical degree you worked on was . . . well, just another degree. You've always seemed to collect degrees as a hobby."

He nodded and laughed in turn. "Yes, and I guess it seems like an expensive hobby. Can't help it, though. I'm just a born student."

"You've actually come awfully close to becoming a *professional* student, John."

"If I hadn't been, we would never have met in the first place," he reminded her as he straightened his white surplice and tugged to loosen his white clerical collar. He turned to his wife. "But this medical degree was important, Louisa. One more service, one more sermon, and then off to Namibia." His eyes twinkled. "Excited?"

She walked forward and kissed him lightly on the lips. "You bet," she said. "This dream of yours infected me years ago. I just never thought we would really do it."

"We never will"—he smiled—"if I don't get this service started."

Jimmy Baumann and Lyle Hawkins were both thumbing through the hymnal, and thus did not notice as Louisa Neville left the sacristy near the front of the church and went unobtrusively to sit in the front pew. They looked up as the pipe organ began to play a simple melody that both whips recognized. "Amazing Grace"

was a hymn used by all Protestant denominations, so when the congregation stood up, they followed along and managed to sing the hymn without too much difficulty.

But neither Baumann nor Hawkins had gone to a church of any denomination in recent years, for all their talk of white Christian America, so after the hymn ended they found themselves searching with confusion through the service book in an attempt to find the pages containing the liturgy. They soon abandoned the attempt and contented themselves with being quiet onlookers. Hawkins sat and fidgeted as Baumann remarked to himself that this Lutheran service seemed suspiciously Catholic. Then he exercised a bit of mental discipline and reminded himself that a white Catholic could still be a good American, no matter what the Klan said.

That was one of the lessons he had learned since joining the WHP. Hatred must be surgically honed to avoid alienating potential racial allies. He had been raised in one of the hundreds of small Protestant denominations deriving ultimately from the Baptists, for whom a Sunday service was essentially a revival meeting, a hymn-sing, and a long emotional sermon. The older churches —Catholic, Lutheran, Episcopalian—with their robes and chants and complex liturgical forms, with constant standing up and kneeling down, struck him as uncomfortably alien. Be broad-minded, Jimmy, he told himself. They're white European Christians, just like you. Don't be a bigot.

The service wound its way through the Gloria in Excelsis, the kyrie, the Gloria Patri, the collects and introit for the day, the epistle and gospel readings. It was a half-hour before the Reverend John Neville mounted the pulpit and began the sermon. He was a man with a youngish face, fast approaching middle age but still somehow boyish-looking. His watery brown eyes seemed somehow distracted, as if fixed upon some private reflection, but his ready toothy smile and ruddy complexion projected a permanent aura of good cheer. He seemed in all respects a man of the middle, without extremes. His light brown hair was thinning with age, but he was nowhere near bald. He was solid enough to indicate that he ate and drank well, but he was far from portly. He was forty years old and looked thirty to most people, until they learned his true age, at which time they decided that he did indeed look forty.

He read a verse from one of Paul's epistles and then preached a sermon about Kierkegaard's *Gospel of Suffering*. Baumann and

Hawkins paid no attention to what he was saying. Hawkins' fidgeting was beginning to annoy Baumann, who kept glancing at the clearly visible watch dial on the wrist of the woman sitting next to him. Come on, man, he thought, make it short, will you?

Louisa listened to her husband preach, remarking to herself how sincere and dedicated he sounded, and wondered if she had been misjudging him recently. As she had grown to know him well during eight years of marriage, she had begun to suspect that Neville's piety was all on the surface, that religion was to him merely another aesthetic exercise, another intellectual abstraction that he found interesting but unmoving. She empathized with the suffering of humanity, while he seemed to analyze it and react to it according to a standard of clerical propriety. She knew that John was an intellectual, and she had always been fascinated by intellectuals, but it was only after living with one for some years that she realized that one trait common to the breed was a greater interest in ideas than in people. For this reason more than any other, she was pleased and a bit surprised that he had been serious about becoming a medical missionary in Africa.

At last the sermon ended, but instead of descending from the pulpit the minister smiled out at the congregation and said, "I'd like to take a moment to say a general good-bye to everyone. I've seen or spoken to most of you in the last few months, I know, but this is my last opportunity to speak to you all at once." He paused and looked around the church, smiling warmly. "Louisa and I will miss you all. The two years we've spent here in Endore have been very precious to us, and if we hadn't long ago committed ourselves to becoming missionaries, I'm sure we'd have been happy to stay here and work here for the rest of our lives."

He then did descend from the pulpit and walked forward to the first pew. He held out his hand and a young woman took it as she rose to her feet and turned to smile at the assembly. She was slender and lovely, with hair so blond as to be almost white.

Hawkins leaned to Baumann and whispered, "That's the captain's cousin?"

"Must be," was the quiet reply. "Jesus! She's a piece of ass!"

Hawkins was a misanthropic misogynist, but he shrugged and attempted to project a worldly sophistication. "Small tits. I like a woman with meat on her bones."

"Shhh," Baumann ordered.

"Our bags are packed and our car is loaded," Reverend Neville was saying. "You all know that for most of my life, my own personal hero has been Albert Schweitzer. I decided long ago, while I was still in the seminary, in fact, that I wanted to follow in his footsteps. My point is that Louisa and I have been preparing for this day for years. Believe me, it wasn't easy earning an M.D. while serving as a minister full-time, and it wasn't easy for Louisa to get her nursing degree while doing all the things a pastor's wife has to do." A few amused and sympathetic laughs arose from the assembly. "But at last I've finished my internship at the hospital in Mannering, and we're leaving for the airport right after the service. The work we will be doing at the medical mission in Namibia will be good work, God's work. But that doesn't mean that we won't miss you all and think of you often. And we hope that you will remember us as well. God bless you all, and good-bye."

The applause that followed seemed oddly out of place after the staid and formal worship service preceding it. Then Louisa Neville sat back down in the pew as John Neville moved to the front of the altar to proceed with the consecration of the bread and wine. The two young whips had supposed that the service was almost over, and both grew increasingly irritated as the distribution of Communion took another half-hour to complete. Hawkins did not partake of the sacrament, but Baumann chose to go forward to the communion rail when the time came. He figured that a slug of wine might help his hangover. It did not.

At last came the Nunc Dimittis and the benediction, and then John and Louisa Neville positioned themselves near the door of the church to greet the parishioners as they left the building, and to say a few more personal good-byes. The two whips waited in line with the others and were able at last to shake hands with the minister. His wife eyed them suspiciously, but Neville smiled broadly and said, "Hello, welcome! I don't think I've seen you boys here before."

"No, Pastor," Baumann replied with an affable smile of his own. "This is the first time we been to church in years."

"Well, I'm glad to see you here." Neville nodded. "I hope you're going to make a habit of it. There'll be a new minister here in a few days, Pastor Benke. I'm sure he'll be happy to get to know you."

"You're going to some mission, you said?"

"Yes, a medical center the church operates in Namibia, in Africa."

"That's too bad," Baumann said, shaking his head. "We wanted to speak with you about something very important, very personal."

"Well, I'm sure that Pastor Benke—" Neville began.

"No, no," Baumann interrupted. "We need to speak with *you*, Reverend. We've heard that you . . . well, that you're a good guy, somebody we can trust, somebody who can help us." After thus oiling Neville's ego a bit, Baumann paused as if in thought. "I know you said you're going to the airport, but do you think you might give us ten minutes after everyone has gone?"

"John," Louisa Neville said, "we don't really have the time to spare."

Neville looked at his wife and then looked back at the two young men. They look like the kind of thugs who are causing so much trouble around here, he thought. But perhaps they are reaching out to the church for help, and missionary work, like charity, does begin at home. "I think we can find ten minutes, Louisa," he said. She began to protest and he cut her short by grinning at her and saying, "I'll just drive a little faster, that's all."

Baumann and Hawkins thanked him, nodded politely to his wife, and then went over and stood quietly and patiently away from the line of people to wait for the minister and his wife to bid their parishioners farewell. Louisa smiled through slightly gritted teeth as she and her husband said good-bye to Louis Cosgrove, the president of the church council. Neville always seemed deferential and just a bit obsequious when dealing with anyone in a position of authority, no matter how minor, and this was another trait she found abrasive. But she rebuked herself for her pettiness as she shook Cosgrove's hand.

It was almost one-thirty by the time the last good-bye had been said and the last hand had been shaken, and then Neville turned to the young men and said, "Well, now, how can I be of help to you boys?"

"Well, sir," Baumann said, eyeing the usher who was preparing to close the church for the day, "this is kinda personal. Can we talk someplace more private?"

"Of course, of course," Neville said amiably. "My office is right down there." He paused and laughed softly. "I guess it isn't really my office anymore, but I think I can use it one last time. Come, follow me."

Hawkins turned to Louisa and did a fairly good imitation of a desperate, troubled young man as he said with a sad and trembling voice, "Ma'am, could you come too? I think maybe you could help."

"My husband is the counselor, not me," she said, trying not to give voice to the cold wariness she was feeling. "I don't know what your problem is, but I don't think I could have anything useful to say."

"Please, lady," Hawkins whined. "We don't know where else to turn." He looked around as if he feared that he was being watched or followed, and then said, "I'm in trouble, lady, real deep trouble. Please listen to us. Please, lady?"

Her intuitive mistrust of the two young men struggled with her instinct to help the unfortunate, and at last she said, "All right. But I doubt I can be of any help."

"Thanks, lady," Hawkins said with apparent relief. "Thanks a lot."

They all followed Neville down the aisle of the church and through the office door to the left of the lectern. As he closed the door behind them, Neville asked, "Now, what seems to be the problem?" He did not comment as his wife pulled the door back open a bit. She went to stand beside her husband, folding her arms in front of her chest and looking at the two young men with suspicion.

Baumann and Hawkins grinned, and the former said, "Well, you see, we're involved with the Hulltech Center over in Mannering."

"That's odd," Louisa said. "I've worked there as a nurse for the past few years, and I've never see either of you. I'm sure I'd remember you if I had."

"We're only there at night and on weekends," Hawkins explained.

She shook her head. "The Center isn't open at night or on weekends."

Baumann moved slowly over to the door and leaned against it,

pushing it shut. "It's open for us"—he smiled—"whenever we want it to be."

His blockage of the only exit was quite pointed, and his movement and sudden shift in tone unnerved her. "What's going on here?" she demanded. "What do you two want?"

"We want you to come with us to the Center," Baumann said calmly.

Neville swallowed hard. All hint of supplication and need had vanished from the faces and voices of the two young men, replaced by a cold, amused imperiousness. "W-we have to c-catch a plane . . ." he stammered.

"No you don't," Baumann said, still smiling. "Here's what you have to do. You have to wait until that usher leaves, and it'd be a good idea if all you said to him was good-bye, know what I mean? Then, Pastor, we're gonna drive to the Center over in Mannering."

"That's out of the question," Louisa insisted.

Baumann shrugged. "I got my orders, lady."

"Orders? What orders? Orders from whom?"

Baumann and Hawkins laughed. "From whooom?" Hawkins mimicked. "From *whoooom*?"

"From your cousin, lady," Baumann answered her.

"My cousin! What are you talking about? I don't have any relatives living around here."

"Sure you do," he laughed. "You just don't know it. You remember your cousin, Captain Bracher, don'tcha?"

"Frederick?" She seemed unpleasantly surprised. "Frederick is at the Hulltech Center?"

"Yeah." Baumann nodded. "Has been for years. He runs the place."

"He most certainly does not!" she snapped. "Mr. Pratt is in charge of the Center. And it's been years since anybody has known where Frederick is. And," she added, raising her voice angrily, "if you think we're going to just drive off with you two, you're sadly mistaken!"

"Yes," John Neville agreed in a voice less forceful than his wife's, more visibly disconcerted. "We have a p-plane to catch," he stammered, "and some very important work to begin. I'm afraid I m-must ask you to leave."

"John," Louisa snapped, "stop acting so nervous! We don't have to be afraid of these punks." She turned and looked at them haughtily.

Hawkins and Baumann exchanged amused glances. And then they drew their guns.

2

Captain Frederick Bracher dropped the file folders down upon the surface of the large mahogany desk and shook his head. Facts do not lie, he thought, and the information written in the files is fact, and the two dozen mutilated bodies stored in the freezers on the third floor of the Hulltech Center for Genetic Research are facts. But when facts seem to run counter to reason, documentation must be very carefully assembled before action is taken. If Neville can assist me in figuring this out before I share the whole thing with Hull, he thought, I'll see that he and Louisa are taken care of. He should be grateful, even if she isn't. He laughed humorlessly, recalling the many disagreements, almost informal debates, he and his younger cousin Louisa had had back in the seventies, when she was a schoolgirl in her early teens and he was a marine in his early twenties. Over the years their intense conversations had evolved into bitter arguments, and eventually their estrangement had become so deep and fundamental that they had stopped seeing each other altogether.

When was the last time I saw Louisa? he mused. Was it the day of her wedding? No, it was after that. She had refused to allow him into the church, and while he had no desire to attend the wedding in the first place, having agreed to go just to placate his forever needling mother, he was nonetheless angered at Louisa's attitude. He had consoled himself with many foolish, melodramatic dreams of vengeance upon her for the affront, but he had outgrown them. His years in the Marines, in the CIA, in Vietnam and Nicaragua and Angola, had enabled him to put his anger and hatred into perspective. Louisa was a blind, well-meaning fool, like so many other white Christian Americans who had been duped by the Communists and the Jews. To take revenge upon her would have been foolish.

Ex-Marine captain, ex-CIA agent Frederick Bracher did not think himself a vengeful man. He was, of course, a dedicated and devoted racial nationalist, and did not regard the struggle being waged against national and racial enemies as vengeful acts, regardless of the harm these creatures had done to the white race and that greatest creation of the white race, the United States of America. But the problem was obvious to any clear-thinking white, and so was the solution. The inferior races, the coloreds, the sexual perverts, and their masters, the Jews, were waging an undeclared war against the white race, against the traditions of American democracy, against the heritage of European civilization, against decency itself; and like any bacillus invading an otherwise healthy organism, they had to be destroyed.

And it had to be done coldly, dispassionately, rationally. There is no vengeance involved in the destruction of germs, he reasoned, though he did acknowledge that he had always experienced a scintillating pleasure in the exercise of power aimed at the destruction of the enemies of the nation and his race. To his own mind, Bracher was neither vengeful nor sadistic, but was rather a soldier in a great crusade which had as its goal the racial purification of the United States and the establishment—no, the *re*establishment—of a white republic on these shores. And if he must use the services of ignorant, undisciplined whip punks in the pursuit of this goal, what of it? And if he had to kowtow to old man Hull because of the millions and millions of dollars at the old reactionary's disposal, what of it? And if racial survival necessitated torturing or killing anyone who stood in the way of the great cause to which he had dedicated himself, what of it? And if he enjoyed his work, so much the better.

Soon enough we will be ready to begin. Soon enough, soon enough. Bracher sighed. If we have time, he thought glumly. The blind, pigheaded idiots who think they run this country don't see the racial war brewing on the streets of every city and town. If we leave it up to them, they will just sit back and rot in their own stupidity while the riffraff overwhelm us and wipe us out. He looked back down at the file folder. This man might be of invaluable use to the White Homeland Party. If he can be brought under control, if he can be trained, if his madness can be turned to our uses.

He heard a knock on his office door and said, "Come." His

voice was brusque and official. Dwayne Briggs entered and came to attention. Briggs was a muscular young man with a closely shaved head and a pale, sensual face. He was another of the so-called "whips" with whom Bracher reluctantly had to deal. Briggs had taken to calling himself a corporal in the army of the WHP, and derived what he regarded as great status in having been chosen by Bracher to serve as his adjutant. The fact that the whip army consisted at the moment of a few hundred alienated and self-important young men mired in a perpetual violent adolescence, and the fact that Briggs was little more than a gofer for Bracher, were things about which the young man chose not to think too carefully.

"Well?" Bracher asked.

"Dr. and Mrs. Neville have arrived, Captain," his adjutant said. "They're waiting in the outer office."

"Good," he responded, rising from behind his desk. "Show them in, and then bring us some sherry."

"Yes, sir, Captain," Briggs replied. He turned about briskly and closed the door behind him. Bracher rose from behind his desk and walked around to stand in front of it. He leaned back against the desk and folded his arms somewhat imperiously, aware that such a stance would communicate authority and confidence. He had no desire to engage in any banter with his cousin, and hoped that an immediate communication of his power and his position would serve to intimidate her into silence. It was her husband with whom he had to speak, after all. Her presence was little more than a courtesy. And, who knows? he thought, smiling wryly, we might need a nurse before we're done here today.

A few moments later the door of his office opened and his adjutant ushered Louisa and her husband into the room. Bracher smiled broadly and opened his arms as he walked toward them, saying, "Louisa! How good to see you! You're as lovely as ever."

She eyed him warily and accepted his kiss on the cheek without comment or responsiveness. "Frederick," she replied, a noncommittal greeting, a mere acknowledgment of his presence.

"And John," Bracher went on, turning to Neville. "It's been too long, don't you think?" He shook Neville's hand with affectionate vigor, smiling at him and slapping him on the arm as if they were the oldest and best of friends.

Neville returned the smile weakly, nervously. His hand, he

knew, was cold and clammy, and when he tried to speak, all he could emit was a nervous giggle.

Louisa Neville knew her husband's strengths and weaknesses, and much as she loved and admired him, the one thing about his personality that had always grated on her above all else was the fact that he was easily intimidated by stronger personalities. She watched with dismay as John's shoulders started to hunch over with an unconscious and involuntary obsequiousness, and she sighed before saying, "All right, Frederick, you sent your punks to kidnap us, and now we're here. What do you want from us?"

"Louisa, you're so mean!" Bracher said, grinning. "You haven't been kidnapped! Far from it, actually. You two are my honored guests, and John here may be of great service, not only to me personally but also to our cause."

" 'Our cause'?" she replied with a curt, humorless laugh. "I don't think I ever shared an opinion with you, Frederick, let alone a cause!"

"Oh, but you and I have been working with each other for three years now, Louisa," Bracher said cheerfully. "Or did you think that it was just a stroke of good luck when Mr. Hull hired you, an unemployed nurse with next to no experience in nursing and absolutely none in a research facility?"

She frowned. "What are you talking about?"

"Why, the Hulltech Center for Genetic Research, of course," he replied. "This entire facility is under my general direction, as is much beyond it. I personally review each and every application for employment, and when I saw yours, well . . ." He shrugged. "Don't bother to thank me, Louisa. I was happy to be of help."

She nodded, angry at what she had been hearing. "You're running this center?"

"Yes indeed."

Her nostrils flared. "Thanks, Frederick. You've just helped get rid of whatever lingering regrets I may have had about leaving my job."

She began to walk toward the door, but Bracher laughed and said, "Come on, Louisa, sit down and relax. Those two boys went to a lot of trouble to get you here today. I don't think they'd take it kindly if you left so soon."

She understood the threat and did not resist as he took her by the arm and led her over to the large leather sofa to the right of

his desk, against the wall of his richly furnished office. "You never change, cousin dear. Still arguing with me about everything, even when you know I'm going to win." He was playing the role of the friendly, solicitous host to the hilt. As he offered her a seat on the sofa and motioned Neville forward to take a seat beside her, the door of his office opened once again and Briggs entered carrying a silver tray with three crystal glasses and a bottle of sherry. "Good, Briggs." Bracher said. "Have you explained to . . . What are their names?"

"Baumann and Hawkins," Briggs replied.

"Yes, of course. Have you explained to them what they'll be doing tonight?"

"Not yet, Captain," the whip replied. "I figured it's still a few hours until sunset."

"Right." He nodded. "Go fill them in and then get everything set up." Briggs placed the tray on the desk and then left the room. Bracher turned back to his unhappy guests. "I'm sure that you could both do with a drink."

"Well, no, thank you, Frederick," Neville said, clearing his throat. "I don't think . . ."

Bracher filled all three glasses, ignoring what Neville was saying, and handed a glass to each of them. He took the third glass in hand and raised it to make a toast. "To the white race," he said. He sipped the sherry and watched out of the corner of his eye as Neville did the same. Louisa held her glass motionless, her eyes fixed with suspicion and obvious dislike on Frederick.

Neville looked from his wife to her cousin and commented to himself how similar they were in appearance. It would have rankled Louisa to hear it, but she and Bracher were the quintessential Aryans of the old Nazi fantasy, with ice-white blond hair and crystalline blue eyes. Both were tall and slender, though Bracher's slimness was muscular and Louisa's was somewhat wraithlike. Each had the same precisely chiseled nose and the same high, aristocratic cheekbones, the same flawless, almost translucent skin and the same long, delicate fingers. They're almost like brother and sister, Neville thought. He took a moment to wonder if Louisa's passionate ethical intensity and Bracher's fanatical nationalism were two sides of the same coin, reflections of personalities that were immovable and single-minded, each in its own way idealistic and intolerant.

There is a difference, of course, Neville thought, sipping once again from the glass of sherry which he had not wanted but which was imparting a warm glow to his stomach and serving to calm his nerves a bit. The difference was that Louisa's passion was rooted in Christian service and self-sacrifice, while Frederick, from all reports, was a murderer.

Neville had met Bracher only a few times, but Bracher was the type of man whose entire personality and whose complete world view communicate themselves to others with an almost startling immediacy. Neville knew that Bracher had been a career officer in the Marines, had seen combat in Vietnam, and that he just barely escaped a court-martial for the gratuitous killing of civilians. He knew that Bracher had joined the CIA, had done God knows what in his ten years as an operative, and then had vanished. Everyone in Louisa's family had assumed that he was engaged in some sort of covert government operation somewhere, but this assumption was belied by the fact that CIA agents had interviewed most of the members of the family in an apparent attempt to locate him. No one seemed to know what Bracher had done, but Louisa's nephew Carl had received the distinct impression that if the CIA ever found Bracher, they intended to kill him.

Neville finished the sherry. I can almost imagine what must have set them after him, he thought. Unauthorized assassinations or something like that. To Frederick, human beings were white European gentiles. Everyone else was chaff. Even though the CIA seemed at times to act as if the Constitution was merely an annoying obstacle, Neville doubted that they wanted agents who would operate on the basis of beliefs such as those held by Frederick Bracher.

Louisa was also looking at her cousin, but her dislike was mingled with regret and sorrow. She was recalling how much she had loved him so many years ago, how heroic he had seemed, how dashing in his uniform.

What had happened? she wondered, as she had so many times over the years. He had always been more a physical than an intellectual man, and had never expressed any sympathy with the civil-rights movement or the generally progressive mood of the country during his youth; but something had happened somewhere along the line, something that had turned the idealistic young marine into a vicious racist fanatic. Maybe it was the war,

maybe it was being a spy for so long, maybe it was . . . maybe it was . . .

She sighed inwardly. She had no idea what had turned her cousin against everything she had always held to be right and true; and at the moment, she did not wish to explore the issue with him. All she wanted was to get out of the Hulltech Center and get on the plane to Namibia.

"Louisa . . ." Bracher smiled. "Don't you like sherry? I can have something else brought in for you . . ."

"All I want from you is an explanation, Frederick," she said coldly. "And you can stop your pretense of friendship and good cheer and all this hail-fellow-well-met nonsense. You know exactly what I think of you, and I know exactly what you think of me."

He laughed. "You misjudge me, my dear, you really do. You have always misjudged me."

"Have I!" She raised an eyebrow skeptically.

"Certainly," he replied. "But since you don't seem in a particularly sociable mood, let me get right to the point. First of all"—and he turned to Neville—"let me apologize for sending for you in such a . . . shall we say, peremptory manner. Secrecy was a prime consideration. I hope I haven't inconvenienced you."

"Oh, no, no, that's perfectly all right," Neville said, giggling again.

"Oh, John!" Louisa muttered in disgust.

"Good, good," Bracher said. "The thing is, I need your help, John. I need someone I can trust to keep certain things to himself. You've always been a rather idealistic fellow, John, but you're also intelligent. I think that the survival instinct might lead you to keep your mouth shut." He glanced at his cousin. "And I'm sure you'll help Louisa to keep quiet as well. Don't want to be a widower, do you?"

Neville's face grew white. "N-no, Frederick, of c-course not."

"Good," Bracher nodded cheerfully. "That's what I figured. You see, I find myself needing someone with medical knowledge and some experience in psychology. I seem to recall that you hold a Ph.D. in psychology, and I know that you've just finished your medical internship, right?"

Neville cleared his throat and replied, "Yes, on both counts. I'm surprised you know about it."

"Oh, I've kept a close watch on everyone in my family," Bracher said. "You're planning to become a medical missionary, I believe. Going to Namibia to give polio shots to Communist niggers or something like that."

"I, ah . . . we are planning to work in Africa, yes," Neville replied. It was obvious that Bracher was unsympathetic to Neville's impending vocation, and the minister went on speaking quickly, both to change the subject and to cut off the protest he knew his wife was about to voice. "But you're interested in psychology? If so, Frederick, there must be lots of people who know more about clinical psychology than I do. My studies and experience are rather limited. Pastoral counseling, that sort of thing."

"I'm surprised you don't know all about this stuff yourself, Frederick," Louisa muttered. "I would think that you've spent quite a bit of time with psychiatrists. Or you should have, anyway."

"Ah, Louisa." Bracher laughed amiably. "Always the wry wit. I'm not interested in wasting my time with psychologists. Most of them strike me as race traitors who make a living out of coddling the weak. No, what I'm interested in . . ." He paused for a moment, as if considering something. "Tell me, John, have you had any experience with forensic medicine, autopsies and the like?"

Neville shrugged. "Just standard medical-school study. Why do you ask?"

"Are you capable of determining the cause of death when presented with a cadaver?"

"I suppose so, as long as there isn't anything exotic or mysterious involved. I'm not a research chemist, you know."

"I know, I know," he mused, still thinking. Then he stood up and said, "I want you to see something we have up on the third floor. Louisa, I suggest you stay here. What I have to show John isn't pleasant."

"I have a strong stomach, Frederick," she said. "I need one, to be related to you."

He chose not to respond to the insult. "Up to you. Follow me." Bracher led Neville from his office out into the hallway of the main floor of the Hulltech Center for Genetic Research. He turned to see Louisa standing in the doorway, her arms folded across her chest. "Have you changed your mind?" Bracher asked.

"No, but I'm not going anywhere until you tell me what this is all about." She looked at her husband threateningly. "And neither is John."

Neville didn't know what to say or how to respond, wishing to aggravate neither his wife nor her cousin, but Bracher didn't even glance at him as he said, "In due time, Louisa, in due time. First we have to go to the third floor."

"There's nothing on the third floor," she objected. "Nothing but file cabinets and records and things like that."

Her cousin nodded. "You've been up there, then?"

"Well, no." She shrugged. "Why would I want to go . . ." Her eyes widened as she understood what Bracher was saying.

"Precisely." He smiled. "No one ever goes up to the third floor—none of the regular employees, that is—because they have all been told that it's only used for storage. A useful fiction, just as is the idea that the purpose of this center is medical research."

She glowered at him in silence for a few moments. "Frederick, just what is going on around here?" she demanded. "What are you talking about?"

"As I just said, cousin, all in due time." He extended his hand to invite her out into the hallway, and she followed hesitantly, her arms remaining folded. "Tell me what you know about your employer," Bracher said as they walked down the corridor toward the elevators.

"You mean *our* employer, don't you?"

"Oh, no, not at all. Creighton Hull is my associate, not my boss."

"Does he pay you a salary?"

"No." He smiled. "I have my own financial resources."

"Which I'm sure you came by honestly," she muttered.

"What do you know about Creighton Hull?" Bracher repeated as he pressed the elevator button.

"Well," Louisa sighed, "I know that he's rich . . ."

"He's a billionaire." Bracher nodded. "Go on."

"I know that he made most of his money a long time ago, before income taxes were very high. Mining of some sort, I think. I know that he's a pretty conservative guy, and something of a philanthropist. When I was hired here I was told that he was devoting enormous sums of money to genetic research in the hopes

of finding things like cancer cures, AIDS cures, and stuff like that." She paused. "Another useful fiction?"

"Totally fictitious, and extremely useful," her cousin replied. "Let me tell you this much at the moment. Mr. Hull is a true conservative, one might even say a reactionary, though wishing to return to the conditions of the past is not a fault when the present is seeing the worldwide decline of the white race."

"Oh, Frederick, for pity's sake . . . !" Louisa began.

The elevator door opened and they entered. Bracher opened a panel in the elevator wall to reveal a digital control board. He punched in a lengthy series of numbers, and then the doors closed. As they began moving upward, he continued, "Hull and I share one common concern . . . more than one, actually, but this one is the most important. Unless something is done about the blacks and the Orientals, and the Jews who control them, the white race is doomed to slavery or possibly even to extinction."

"I'll bet you lose sleep over that." Louisa laughed with derision.

"I do, Louisa, and so should you," he said without a hint of humor. "And so does Hull."

"So what does this have to do with the Hulltech Center?"

"Genetic research, of course," Bracher replied. "Improving the human strain. Don't you remember the experiments begun by the S.S. fifty years ago? The early attempts they made to weed out inferior bloodlines so as to breed a master race? Well, that was a noble cause that was cut short by the blind ignorance of the Western powers."

Louisa laughed despite her anger and disgust. "A noble cause! Frederick, you've got to be kidding! The S.S.? The *Nazis*? That's ridiculous! Every schoolchild knows how crazy those people were!"

"Of course every schoolchild knows it. The school systems and the textbook publishers are all controlled by Jewish interests. And the Nazis weren't crazy," he added. "Just too moderate for their own good."

"Too moderate? The Nazis were too *moderate*?"

"Yes," he said as the elevator doors opened and he stepped out into the third-floor hallway. "The war was almost lost before they realized that it wasn't enough just to segregate the Jews. The extermination didn't begin in earnest until 1943. That's why so

many of the Jews escaped. And the racial research the S.S. began was lacking direction and coordination."

"You're a sick man, Fred," she shouted, and then looked at her husband. Her eyes seemed to be asking: John, why don't you say something?

Neville cleared his throat and stammered, "Well, I, ah . . . that is . . . well . . . we're all the children of God, Frederick. I mean, Christ died for us all—"

"Oh, John, don't be ridiculous," Bracher snapped, dismissing the minister's words with a wave of the hand as he led them down the corridor. "We're doing more than just research into eugenics here, of course. One of our researchers has come up with a delightfully useful idea. He's attempting to create a gaseous chemical that will induce an AIDS-like virus in skin tissue with high levels of melanin concentration." He smiled. "I'm sure you remember your high-school biology, Louisa. Melanin is the sun-screen chemical in human skin, which varies skin color. The higher the melanin level, the darker the skin."

Louisa considered this for a moment and then said, "I'm not sure I understand."

"It's quite simple," he replied. "Once we have developed the gas, we'll release it into the atmosphere and in a very short time every black on the face of the earth will have AIDS. In a few years, they'll all be dead, and the Jews will have lost their most useful tool."

Louisa stopped walking. She glared at her cousin for a moment and then turned and strode with determination back toward the elevator. "I'm going to the police," she muttered. The elevator doors were still open and she pressed the first-floor button after she entered.

Bracher followed her back and stood in front of her, smiling placidly as the elevator doors remained open. "Let's get one thing straight, cuz. Without knowing the code that gets this elevator up to the third floor and back down to the first, you aren't going anywhere. The stairway doesn't go to the third floor. The windows don't open and the glass is unbreakable. And even if you did manage to get downstairs, my friend Briggs and his whip friends would keep you from leaving the building." He paused. "And they might not be all that gentle about it."

"So we're prisoners," she said, her voice trembling.

"Guests," he corrected her. "Very carefully guarded guests. Now, please, Louisa, come with me. I'll explain everything in a few minutes." He began to walk back down the corridor. Neville followed him, and Louisa, after a long hesitation, followed them both.

"John," Bracher said as they neared the end of the hallway, "I am going to show you some human remains. I want you to try to determine the cause of death."

"But don't you have people here who can answer that question better than I can?" Neville asked, coughing slightly.

"You don't understand me," Bracher said. "I already know the cause of death. But I want you to see for yourself and come to your own conclusions. You'll understand why soon enough."

He opened the door of a room at the end of the corridor and preceded Neville and Louisa inside. He waited for them to enter, then closed the door behind them. He walked over to the rear wall of the large, empty, starkly white room as Neville looked around and decided that this room must have been designed to serve as a kitchen. Against the wall stood a number of large freezer cases, and as Bracher placed his hand on the door handle of one, he turned to his cousin. "Last chance, Louisa," Bracher warned her. "This isn't a pretty sight."

"I can avert my eyes if I want to, Frederick," she replied coldly.

"I think you may want to," he said as he pulled open the door. She averted her eyes almost immediately. Her husband would have done the same, but for the fact that he knew that Bracher expected him to examine the contents of the freezers. Neville didn't think it would be wise to disappoint him.

Neville walked closer and, repressing his nausea, looked into the freezer. It was packed full with parts of human bodies: arms, hands, legs, internal organs; wild, staring eyes set into severed heads; chunks of flesh torn brutally from human bodies; ripped and raked and ruined pieces of mutilated corpses.

"Your findings, Doctor?" Bracher asked, a hint of amusement in his voice. What a weakling you are, John, he thought.

Neville leaned closer, feeling the bile rising in his throat. He looked at the edges of the body parts, at the length and structure of the scrape wounds. He stepped back and wiped his brow. "Well, I couldn't be certain, of course . . ."

"Of course," Bracher agreed patiently. "Just give me your impressions. What killed these men?"

Neville sighed. "These corpses . . . they were some of those tough kids around here, the, ah, the whips?"

"Yes. You noticed the shreds of leather and the earrings and the shaved scalps on the skulls, of course."

"Of course." He paused. "Well, I would have to say, as strange as it sounds, that these boys were torn apart by wild beasts."

"Precisely the findings of the coroner," Bracher agreed, and then leaned forward to say in almost conspiratorial tones, "the problem, John, is that these two dozen tough, armed, street-fighting kids were killed by one unarmed man."

Neville stared at Bracher for a moment, and then, at a loss how to respond to so outrageous an assertion, he said, "That's . . . remarkable, to be sure."

"It's more than remarkable, John," Bracher said, closing the freezer door. "It may very well be a matter of the greatest importance."

"Yes, yes, of course it may, of course it may," Neville agreed, having not the foggiest notion what Bracher was talking about.

"Come with me, John, Louisa. I want you to meet some prisoners." He led them from the room and they followed him down the corridor. "You need some background to understand why you are here and what I want from you."

"At last, the truth," Louisa said. "And why doesn't it surprise me that you have people imprisoned here?"

"Your concern is touching, if misplaced, Louisa," Bracher said calmly. "It's fortunate that you and I are related, because otherwise I might be tempted to take exception to your attitude."

"Take all the exception you want, Frederick."

Bracher was not accustomed to being spoken to in such a dismissive manner, and it required great self-control for him not to strike his cousin in the face. Turning to Neville, he said, "You know quite well, John, that there are many people in this area who are in sympathy with our goals, even if they don't really know what we're doing here at Hulltech. You're probably wondering how I managed to get hold of these human remains."

"Yes," Neville agreed, though the question had not occurred to him at all.

"I obtained them in the same way I got hold of the two prisoners you are about to meet," he explained. "Cooperative friends in local positions of influence. All official records of the murders have been erased, all records of the arrest of these two men have been removed from local files and are now in my possession, and they themselves have been given to me for as long as I want them. I'm sure that you understand that all of this is confidential information."

"Of course, of course." Neville nodded. Louisa fumed silently, following behind the two men back up the hallway, past the still-open elevator, and toward the other end of the corridor. Bracher stopped walking and turned to Neville. "You're familiar with the word 'lunatic,' of course."

"Sure," Neville replied. "A lunatic is a madman."

"And do you know where the word comes from?"

"Well, of course. Most people do. The root of the word is 'luna,' the moon. A lunatic is someone who goes mad when the moon is full or new. Some people speculate that it has something to do with the gravitational pull of the moon upon fluids in the brain, like the effect upon the tides."

"Precisely." Bracher resumed walking down the corridor. Neville walked along beside him and Louisa continued to follow. There was sufficient room for her to walk on her cousin's other side, had she so chosen. She chose not to.

"Last month, coincidentally on the last of the two nights of the full moon, the local police were called by some farmers to investigate a disturbance up near Gladstone Creek. They found what you saw in the freezers. Two dozen whips, killed, ripped to shreds, some apparently partially devoured. Standing in the middle of the carnage were two Gypsies, the two men I am taking you to see. Apparently neither of them speaks English, but they both speak Spanish, and so did one of the policemen who arrested them. I read the officer's report. Apparently the two Gypsies offered no resistance to the questioning . . . but their answers were what aroused my curiosity." Bracher drew up to another large door and stopped. "The younger of the two, probably trying to keep his older friend out of trouble, claimed that he and he alone had killed the young men. The older one, probably hoping to save the younger from imprisonment, claimed that his companion was not responsible for his actions because he is a werewolf."

A few moments of silence followed Bracher's words, and then Neville laughed despite his ever-present undercurrent of nervousness. "Frederick, that's—"

"Yes, I know, it's absurd. But there's more in the official file. When the doctors examined him—the younger one, I mean—they found shreds of human flesh embedded between his teeth." He paused, allowing his words to register, and then went on. "I think that this man is a lunatic, that when the moon rises he succumbs to a murderous rage so overpowering that it enabled him to kill two dozen armed boys without suffering any injury himself. I don't know how and I don't know why. That," he said meaningfully, "is what I want you to find out."

Neville nodded thoughtfully, not quite knowing how to respond. "Yes, yes, I see. But—"

"You don't really see anything, John," Bracher interrupted him, "because you haven't been listening carefully or thinking about what I've been saying. Consider this: if we can discover the process, the psychological mechanism of this Gypsy's madness, and if we can train him, condition him, manipulate his rage, we might be able to use him as a weapon in the war."

"In the . . . in the war?" Neville asked. "What war? We aren't at war."

"You're wrong, John," Bracher said sternly. "We *are* at war. The white race is at war, and it's a war for our very survival. The problem is that most whites are like you and Louisa, well-meaning fools who don't *know* that we're at war and that we're losing it. All of the nonsense of the past sixty years, the creeping socialism that started with Roosevelt and his Jewish advisers, the so-called civil-rights movement, the manipulation of our country by the Jews occupying Palestine, the economic attack coming from the Japanese and the other Asiatics, the opening of our borders to the dope-dealing leeches from Central and South America—it's all part of a massive coordinated war being waged against the white race in general and the United States in particular." He paused. "Take these two men you're about to meet, for example. Do you remember that Mariel boat exodus?"

"The . . . the Mariel . . . ?" Neville began.

"Yes, when that weak-kneed idiot Jimmy Carter let Castro dump his spies and criminals and junkies and queers into the United States. Well, that's how these two ended up here. It's all in the

FBI file on them, which I managed to obtain though one of my contacts. They escaped from a federal detention center, and the FBI is still looking for them."

"You have friends in the FBI?" Louisa asked, astounded from her silence.

"Yes, though not on the higher levels, unfortunately," Bracher replied. "But the point, John, is that we *are* at war, and we're going to start fighting back. We're doing a number of things here at Hulltech. The genetic research, of course, but much else as well. We've begun to make efforts to coordinate all the disorganized, rather anarchistic white supremist groups around the country. These kids around here, the whips as they call themselves, will be the stormtroopers, the shock troops of the revolution. We're even building a training compound for them, up in the hills. And when we have our organizational plan completed and our chemical weapons ready and our arms sufficiently stockpiled, we're going to start an insurrection against the Jews and Communists who run this country."

"Frederick," Louisa said firmly, shaking her head, "you are out of your ever-loving mind."

He smiled coldly. "And you, Louisa, are a traitor to your race, a traitor to your ancestors, a traitor to your descendants."

Louisa sighed and shook her head. This was becoming depressingly similar to the conversations she and her cousin had had so often when they were younger.

"Well, in any event," Neville said, "why do you need me? I have some training in psychology, true, but I'm not a practicing psychologist, Frederick, not even a practicing physician, not yet, anyway. In Namibia I expect to be able to—"

"Yes," Bracher interrupted, "but you have knowledge of these things, certainly more knowledge than I have. And . . . well, we have a singular lack of trained psychologists in our movement."

"I don't wonder," Louisa observed. "Any psychologist who came into contact with you people would start to write up commitment papers."

He stared at her coldly. "Like it or not, cousin, the future of the white race rests in the hands of the people Hull and I are attempting to organize. The great racial war is already raging, and we are going to fight back and we are going to win. And when the war ends in our victory, you might find yourself quite happy

to be related to a major figure in the new governing circle. Happy, and secure.''

Bracher took a ring of keys from his pocket and unlocked the door. He pushed it open and then motioned for Neville and Louisa to precede him into the room. Neville took his wife's arm to lead her with him through the doorway, but she pushed his hand away and entered before him, angry at him for not seeming to be at least as outraged as she was. They walked past Bracher and were greeted by the same two young men who had brought them to the Hulltech Center at gunpoint a short time earlier.

Baumann and Hawkins smiled at them snidely as Captain Bracher shut the door behind him and locked it. He turned to his unwilling guests and said, ''Now, John, Louisa, allow me to introduce my lunatic.''

3

The Hulltech Center for Genetic Research was not merely the largest building in the town of Mannering, North Dakota; it was the largest building in that entire region of the state. The Center was sleekly designed, built of stone and steel and glass, three stories in height, and shaped like an enormous I, with one long central section bounded by long perpendicular wings at each end. The third story was closed off and, as far as was generally known, was not in use, but the other two stories were more than sufficient for the public needs of the Center, for the safe, legal, conventional research. Fifteen offices, twenty-five conference, file, and lecture rooms, and seventy-five fully equipped laboratories filled the first and second floors. The third floor also had conference rooms, labs, offices, and so forth, but they were fewer in number, because a good deal of space was taken up by the cells of a covert prison.

Hulltech was an impersonal edifice, cold and unadorned, unrelentingly modern, and a visual expression of efficiency and technology and science. In this respect it did not differ from the thousands of similar structures built in the United States during the last quarter of the twentieth century, for by that time America's architects seemed to have developed and accepted a number of common assumptions. Buildings, regardless of purpose or function or location, must be sleek and hard and cold, must be severe and uncomplicated, must be straight and simple and sharp. Buildings must express the precision of the scientific mind, not the yearnings of the unscientific heart.

A traveler passing by the broad, treeless plain where the Hulltech Center for Genetic Research stood might therefore assume that it was a factory or a school or an office building or a hospital or a research center, which ostensibly it was. Day in and day out the corridors and laboratories and conference rooms of the first

and second floors saw the presence of scientists, physicians, nurses, and the ubiquitous bureaucrats and money handlers. Other people came and went, volunteer test subjects, patients willing to share their diseases with the researchers, college students seeking experience, high-school students seeking part-time minimum-wage employment, elementary-school students on school trips.

Creighton Hull, the elderly billionaire who had both founded and funded the Center, rarely graced the bustling corridors with his presence, but on those rare occasions when he was able to get away from California and visit Mannering, he greeted the staff with smiles and waves and friendly if superficial conversation. He was generally liked by the personnel of the Center, though to be sure, they did not have to deal with him in any direct, official capacity. He left the administration of the Center in other hands, only rarely stepping in himself to issue a directive or a memo.

Indeed, the Center was paradoxically decentralized, split up into numerous departments, which were themselves split up into small research teams, with no one team knowing what any other team was working on. Everyone knew that *somewhere* in the building, *someone* was doing cancer research; but no one seemed to know who and no one seemed to know where. All departments and teams were under the supervision of chief administrator William Pratt, who was neither a physician nor a scientist nor a businessman. No one knew why he was running the Center or what his qualifications were, but he was in charge, he signed the paychecks, he made the research assignments.

There were many things the staff did not know, and the decentralization of the Hulltech Center tended to prevent them from even posing questions. No one knew who the "F.B." was who occasionally countersigned Pratt's directives. No one knew why the third floor of the Center was unused when the first and second floors seemed so crowded. No one knew why so much of the research being done seemed so irrelevant to conventional genetic research, so arcane, so peculiar. (But, of course, someone in the Center, somewhere in the Center, was doing the really important stuff.)

And no one seemed to notice that the elevators did not go up to the third floor, nor did anyone discover the digital control panels in the elevators that would allow them to.

And no one seemed to notice that the three hundred employees

of the Center counted among their number not one black, not one Hispanic, not one Indian, not one Jew.

And, of course, when the workday ended at five o'clock, they all went home. No one was allowed to work late without special permission, and that permission was for one reason or another never given. The middle-aged man in the security booth at the parking-lot entrance went home after being relieved by his night-time replacement, a sallow young man whose uniform was ill-fitting, whose ear was pierced, whose head was clean-shaven beneath his cap, who in the darkness of night allowed entry to other young men similar to himself, except that they were dressed in leather and walked with an arrogant swagger and wore swastikas pinned in their ears and carved into the flesh of their arms.

And when the sun set on the Hulltech Center for Genetic Research, when the lights went on in the rooms of the third floor and the select researchers went to work and the WHP guards prowled the corridors and the kidnapped human test subjects in the soundproof rooms were subjected to experiments and probes and misery and pain and usually death, the cold light of the stars and the moon illuminated the Center's metamorphosis. It ceased its pretense of fighting disease and devoted itself to its creation. It ceased to concern itself merely with genetics as it turned its attention to eugenics. It ceased to be a sister of the hundreds of other institutions of research around the United States, becoming instead a distant relation of Mengele's laboratory in Auschwitz.

And now it was late afternoon on a Sunday, and even the special researchers were absent from the Center. Only a handful of whips were on the grounds, and only two of them, Jimmy Baumann and Lyle Hawkins, were waiting on the other side of the door as Frederick Bracher ushered John and Louisa Neville into the room.

As the steel door was locked behind him, John looked about with undisguised trepidation. The walls were smooth and antiseptic, and the echo of their voices made him wonder if steel or stone lay beneath the light blue paint. The ceiling was an unusually high twenty-five feet from the floor, and small windows near the top of the wall allowed a few rays of the setting sun to enter the room. It was when Neville noticed the bars in front of the glass of the windows that he realized that this area of the Center was used as a prison.

He also realized that the room itself was merely the entrance-

way, the anteroom, as it were, of a series of holding cells. At the far end of the room another steel door, this one with a small barred window, was set into the cold stone wall. As it was opened by Jimmy Baumann, Neville could see even before Bracher ushered him through that it led to a narrow corridor on both sides of which were dozens of barred doorways. Neville glanced into one such cell as he, Bracher, and Louisa proceeded down the corridor, and he shuddered at the thought of what it must be like to be imprisoned here. The doors themselves consisted of steel frames and long steel bars, which afforded an observer a clear view of the entire interior. Neville's nose wrinkled at the unpleasant smells, the stench of dried urine and feces, of unwashed people and filthy cloth, all intermingled with the smell of industrial-strength antiseptic and chemicals whose identities were unknown to him and about whose uses he chose not to think.

Lord, protect us! he thought miserably.

Bracher seemed to be acting as a tour guide as he led his cousin and her husband through the central corridor of the private prison. "We've paid close attention to security, of course," he was saying. "The windows here and in the corridors outside are one-way glass, so that prying eyes are kept out. The walls are soundproof, and everything is constructed of the strongest materials available. No one can get in without being admitted, and no one can get out without being released."

Louisa stopped walking and touched her cousin's arm. "Frederick, wait a moment, wait a moment. I don't want to argue with you and I don't want to fight with you, but you simply must let John and me out of here. I don't like this place, Frederick. It makes me nervous. It makes me sick. It makes me—"

"Give it time and thought," Bracher interrupted. "It should make you proud. Now, be quiet." He came to a halt in front of one of the cells and nodded in its direction. "These are our guests. The younger one is called Janos Kaldy. The older one is called Blasko. No given name, apparently, which is not uncommon among inferior breeds." As Bracher spoke, Blasko came forward and began to speak rapidly and with obvious agitation in a language comprehensible to none of the three onlookers.

Bracher frowned. "I think he is speaking some sort of gutter Spanish, but we have no one here who can translate it. I'm sure you understand that we don't let racial inferiors in here, except

as experimental subjects." He felt Louisa's eyes boring into him from behind, but he did not turn to face her. He knew how she was reacting to what he had just said, but now that it was drawing close to sunset and to what he hoped would be an observable seizure on Kaldy's part, he had no wish to waste further time arguing with his cousin.

"Surely some linguists from a university . . . ?" Neville began hesitantly.

"No, our security concerns make that impossible. We can't take the risk of anyone finding out what we're doing here."

Blasko continued to speak in a desperate, frightened, imploring tone, and he seemed to be shifting back and forth among a variety of languages. Neville shrugged. "I can't be of any help to you with this, Frederick. Greek and Latin and Hebrew I know. French and German I know, but this . . ." He shook his head.

"Don't be obtuse, John," Bracher said curtly. "I've already told you why you're here. I need a psychological observer, not a translator. It's Kaldy we're interested in, not Blasko. We're only keeping him with Kaldy because they were found together, and we don't want to separate them until we know for sure what occurred, and why."

Louisa was trying not to be interested in what she was seeing and hearing, and she had thus far been quite successful. The brief glimpse she had had of the contents of the freezer had disturbed her greatly, but it was this confrontation with the naked reality of what had been happening at the place where she had worked year after year which truly filled her with anger and sorrow and revulsion. She looked at the two men before them in the cell, and she felt pity and shame rising in her simultaneously. The poor men, she thought, and at the same moment: How many others? As I was blissfully, ignorantly working here every day, how many other poor people were being imprisoned and abused and God knows what else, right above my head?

She looked in at the two captive men, noting the effect imprisonment had apparently had on them. The older one, Blasko, was a sturdy if haggard man in his late sixties or early seventies. His hair was white and his handlebar mustache was a soft gray. He wore the tattered garb so common among the oppressed and uprooted, clothing once colorful and now faded, though some

small hint of past beauty still clung in spots to the faded wool and cotton.

Janos Kaldy, the younger Gypsy, looked ill, and Louisa attributed his appearance to his circumstances. He seemed to be a man in his twenties, but his eyes, which gazed vacantly ahead of him at a blank spot on the smooth wall, seemed old and weary. His skin was a chalky white and his luxuriant black hair was matted and dirty. His thin mouth and slightly hooked nose gave him an ascetic cast, and his stooped shoulders and thin, boney chest reinforced the impression of disease.

She turned to her cousin and began to protest the treatment of the two men, but suddenly Blasko's pleas seemed to sound familiar, somehow slightly more comprehensible to her. Is that Italian? she wondered. Louisa had studied Italian in high school and college, and what she was hearing now sounded vaguely similar to that Mediterranean tongue. But it was not identical to the precise and melodic Florentine dialect which formed the basis of formal Italian, and she was uncertain of her knowledge as she asked, "*Mi scusa, signore, ma sta parlando italiano*?"

Blasko's eyes widened joyfully. "*Mei fuo capirend? Oh, signora, mei fuo capirend?*"

"*Mi sembra*," she replied. "*Mi sembra di capire, ma questo non e italiano, vero*?"

"*Parlo romanscho, signora, romanscho, una linguia dal Alpi*," the Gypsy answered excitedly.

"What language is that?" Bracher demanded.

"He says that he is speaking Romansch," Louisa replied. "I've heard of that language. It's spoken in only one place, one Swiss canton. It's close enough to Italian for me to understand him and for him to understand me."

Bracher smiled broadly. "How fortunate that I was so eager to see you again, my dear Louisa! Well, then, tell us what this fellow is so upset about!"

Louisa turned to Bracher and said viciously, "I'm not going to help you, Frederick! I'm not going to play a part in this . . . this barbaric . . ." Her sentence drifted off into an angry, incoherant sputter.

"But our friend here seems to want to communicate with me very badly," Bracher replied, still smiling. "You really must serve

as translator, if not for my sake, then for his." He leaned forward, secure in his logic and certain of her response to it. "Surely you don't bear this poor creature any ill will, do you?"

Louisa's eyes burned into Bracher's, and he returned her gaze with detached amusement as she found herself forced to bow to the reasoning she greatly wished to be able to refute. At last she turned back to Blasko and asked, "*Che ci vuol dire, signore*?"

"*Liberatea mei di questa cella!*" Blasko screamed. "*Incatenate Kaldy, incatenatelo en mettetici il fiore del luper dormente sulle catene, e liberatea mei di questa cella!*"

"He wants to be removed from the cell," Louisa said.

"Oh, I'm sure he does," Bracher laughed.

She ignored his amusement. "He also says that his friend must be chained securely and some sort of plant must be tied to him, but I don't know what plant he's talking about. He calls it the 'flower of the sleeping wolf.' "

"Probably some primitive superstition of theirs," Bracher said. He placed his hand on the strong steel bars. "Well, he's going to stay right where he is. And we don't need any chains to keep our lunatic under control. These bars are more than sufficient."

"They will not suffice," Kaldy said softly in clear but accented English.

The sudden and unexpected comment by the hitherto silent prisoner was followed first by a moment of startled silence and then by a very angry observation by Bracher. "You were spoken to in English when the police arrested you, and again when you were brought here. Did you think it was funny to pretend that you didn't understand?"

"The bars of this cell will not hold me when the change comes," Kaldy said, ignoring Bracher's question. His voice was even and emotionless, and a subtle undercurrent of sadness permeated every word. "If my friend Blasko is left in here with me, he will be killed. If you do not follow his instructions about restraining me, you will also be killed."

Bracher's face grew red and he folded his arms across his chest. "It has been my experience that prisoners are well-advised not to threaten their captors, you Gypsy pig!"

Kaldy sighed. "The distinction between a threat and a warning should not be lost on someone like you, Captain."

The Gypsy's words were calm, rational, and subtly derisive,

and they therefore infuriated Bracher. Before he could respond to the young Gypsy, Neville broke in tentatively. "Frederick, whatever else you decide to do, it might be a good idea to separate them."

Bracher glowered at Neville and his eyes narrowed to serpentine slits. "John, I am not accustomed to being argued with, not by people like you, and certainly not by vermin like him."

"Frederick, listen to me," Neville said, wiping the sweat from his brow. "I don't approve of any of this, you know that—"

"Your approval or disapproval is of no importance," Bracher muttered.

"Okay, maybe not, maybe not. But you want an educated observation and evaluation from me. I'll do what you ask, but I will not be responsible for this old man's death. If Kaldy is as dangerous as you say he is, then you simply *must* separate them before he has his seizure. I mean, if this man is a violent madman, you might very well find that he'll kill the other Gypsy, and you yourself said that . . . well, that you wanted to keep him here until you understood everything about this . . . this situation."

Bracher was reluctant to accede to the request of the older prisoner, and he was determined not to allow the younger one to believe that his warning had been effective, but he was forced to accept the fact that Neville was making sense. "Very well, John," he muttered, looking angrily at Kaldy. "I'll take your advice." He looked over at Baumann and said, "Put the old man in another cell." Then, still speaking to Baumann but looking directly at Kaldy, as if challenging the Gypsy to contradict him, he added, "We'll leave the other one where he is. The bars will keep him there."

Baumann looked at the prisoners and grinned. "Yes, sir," he said cheerfully.

Kaldy paid no attention to them. He was once again gazing vacantly at the wall. It was as if he dwelled in a private interior world from which he had been momentarily summoned to make his few comments and to which he had retreated once he had finished speaking.

The next half-hour was spent in quiet, methodical preparation for what was assumed to be Kaldy's impending seizure. Bracher was using only two whips to guard the prisoners, reasoning that even that number was probably excessive to keep watch over two

Gypsies, but not wishing to take any chances with what he hoped might be a very useful captive. Jimmy Baumann transferred Blasko to a cell down the corridor while Lyle Hawkins set up a tripod and then affixed a video camera to it. He inserted a videotape into the machine and then began to hook up additional lights in Kaldy's cell. While he was doing this he left the cell door open for a short time. It was true that had Kaldy attempted to escape at that moment, either Baumann or Bracher himself could have shot him down easily; but the Gypsy made no effort to leave the cell, nor even looked over at the doorway. He continued to sit motionless on the plastic stool, gazing at the wall.

"If this fellow is the lunatic we suspect him to be," Bracher explained to Neville, "it may be useful to have a visual record of his behavior for further study."

It was Louisa who replied to this, not her husband. She had managed to restrain her anger, and when now she spoke to her cousin it was with an almost plaintive tone. "Frederick, do you remember when we were children, when your mother and my mother used to take us to church together?"

"Of course I remember, cuz," Bracher replied amicably. "Boring Sunday morning after boring Sunday morning."

"Well, didn't anything you learned in church mean anything to you? Didn't any of it stay with you, even a little?" She seemed on the verge of weeping. "Frederick, don't you understand that what you're doing is wrong, just simply morally wrong?"

Bracher seemed almost embarrassed by what he regarded as her childishness. "Oh, come on, Louisa!"

"Don't you remember what Christ said about loving your enemies, turning the other cheek, forgiving seventy times seven times? Don't you remember what he said about the peacemakers being blessed? Don't you remember what he said about loving your neighbor as yourself?"

Bracher leaned his face close to hers and, as if uttering a profound, significant truth, said, "Don't forget, Louisa, that Jesus was a Jew!"

Louisa did not respond to this. She found the statement absolutely flabbergasting.

Lyle Hawkins finished lighting the cell and making certain that the video equipment was ready, and then nothing remained to be done but wait. Bracher considered sending one of the whips for

more sherry, but then decided against it. He smoked a few cigarettes and took a perverse delight in blowing the smoke in Neville's face to make him cough. No one spoke as the minutes crawled by. Jimmy Baumann stood beside the door, a shotgun cradled in his arms, while Hawkins stood behind the tripod, waiting for Bracher to tell him to begin taping. Bracher stood on one side of the tripod, and Neville, much against his wishes, stood on the other. They both were watching Kaldy carefully. Louisa sat on a chair near the door, not wishing at all to be present, but refusing to give her cousin the satisfaction of requesting permission to leave.

At five-forty-one the sun set, and the full moon, partially hidden by clouds, was visible through the small window near the ceiling of the cell. At six o'clock, Janos Kaldy began to scream.

"Begin," Bracher said softly, and Hawkins began to tape the events transpiring in the cell before him.

Kaldy's face contorted in agony and his body began to shake and tremble as if waves of pain were washing over it. His screams were incessant and terrible, and Louisa held her hands over her ears to block them out. The Gypsy fell from the stool onto the cold, hard floor and doubled over in a fetal position, and then emitted another shriek of agony as his arms and legs thrashed wildly about. The sound of crunching bone mingled with his screams, and both Bracher and Neville leaned forward, open-mouthed, disbelieving the evidence of their own eyes.

Kaldy was changing.

The change was at first very subtle, an almost imperceptible elongation of his arms, attended by the same sound of bone scraping against bone. His shoulders began to swell as if they were being filled with liquid, but then rippling muscles pushed out on his arms and back and chest. His black eyes grew yellow and luminescent, and the agonized, painfully human look of desperation in them began to flicker and weaken, began to be replaced by something unearthly, hellish, terrifying. Kaldy's legs pulled upward slightly, as if compensating for the elongation of his arms, and then thick brown fur burst from every inch of his skin. Kaldy threw himself onto his knees and faced his captors, but his face did not long remain his own. Blood poured from his mouth as long fangs thrust upward from his lower jaw and downward from his upper; his lips disappeared beneath the hairy muzzle that grew

downward from the squat, moist nostrils. A long canine tongue began to flick out over the fangs.

Kaldy screamed once more, and then, as the last spark of human intelligence faded from his eyes, he began to growl.

The creature—for it was no longer Kaldy—stood to its feet and gazed at the humans on the other side of the cell bars with undisguised, aggressive, hate-filled appetite. For a moment, no one moved, not Neville, not Bracher, not the whips. Behind them Louisa whispered, "God have mercy!"

Her words seemed the catalyst to action. The creature threw itself against the bars, once, twice, and then the entire steel frame tore free from its casing and crashed loudly on the floor. Hawkins stopped taping and jumped back as both Louisa and Neville screamed and Baumann leveled his shotgun at the creature and fired both barrels. The bits of burning metal might as well have been made of paper, for they thudded audibly into the monster's chest but did not impede its attack. The creature ignored the gun as it roared furiously and then slashed out at Baumann. The sharp talons ripped through the young man's flesh and tore his jaw from his face. The creature slashed at him again, shearing through his throat and sending his severed head cascading away from his body to bounce absurdly away.

Louisa ran from the corridor out into the anteroom. Her husband and cousin followed her as a terrified Lyle Hawkins picked up the tripod, video camera and all, and attempted to club the creature with it. The beast deflected the blow as if the heavy tripod were a twig, and then snapped its fanged jaws shut on Hawkins' arm. The whip shrieked as the creature tore off a thick chunk of flesh, swallowed it, and then ripped what was left of the arm from its socket. The creature ran from the corridor into the anteroom, leaving Hawkins' shuddering body lying in a pool of his own blood.

The escape of the creature and its attack on the whips had happened so quickly that neither Bracher nor Neville nor Louisa had been able to get to the still-locked door of the anteroom. As the beast rushed in from the corridor, Bracher, unwilling to attract its attention by moving, froze motionless in one corner while his cousin and her husband whimpered in another.

In the anteroom the creature stopped and looked around in what appeared to be confusion, as if perplexed by the fact that its escape

from the cell and the corridor had left it still confined within a room, as if it had expected to be outside beneath the stars. It seemed to forget the presence of the three remaining humans as it searched the walls and ceiling of the anteroom for a pathway to freedom. Its limited intelligence was not able to comprehend the nature and purpose of the doorway against the far wall. Bracher watched the creature as its eyes moved along the walls, and he began slowly to inch his hand downward toward the revolver in the shoulder holster under his jacket; then he stopped, thinking better of it. If Baumann had been unable to stop this monstrosity with a shotgun, what good would a revolver be? He remained motionless, hoping that the beast would ignore him, would go for Neville or Louisa first and allow him to get to the door.

Neville and Louisa huddled together in the corner, silent and trembling, certain that they were not destined to emerge alive from the room. But then the creature looked up at the small window near the high ceiling of the room, and through the bars it saw the bright moon and the few stars struggling to shine through the clouds. It tried to leap the twenty-five feet from the floor to the window, but fell short on the first attempt. It leapt again and this time managed to grab hold of the bars. The creature looked down at the empty cell and snarled, and then, holding on to one bar with one hand and using every bit of its inhuman strength, it tore the other bars from their encasements and then shattered the thick glass with one blow from its mighty paw. In an instant the creature had swung up and out through the gaping hole, had fled into the night, and was gone.

Bracher, Neville, and Louisa did not move at first, did not display any emotion, did not react to what had just occurred. Then Neville fainted and Louisa began to weep hysterically.

And Captain Frederick Bracher, relieved at being alive and largely unaffected by the familiar sights and smells of death, was smiling, astounding himself with the audaciousness of the plan that was even now taking shape in his mind.

4

When Bracher was seven years old, he and another child had been caught in some silly childhood misbehavior by their teacher and had been sent to the school's principal for punishment. He remembered the feeling of being a small boy standing nervously in the presence of authority and power; he recalled quite clearly the way his small heart had pounded in his chest, and he remembered the almost audible churning in his stomach, the sick, sinking feeling; he recalled the way his little legs shook as he waited for the omnipotent principal to speak.

These thoughts occurred to him because he was experiencing the same sensations at this very moment. He had submitted his report and had urgently requested a meeting as soon as possible. He was standing, not at attention, but not quite at ease, listening to the pounding of his heart, feeling his stomach churn, trying to keep his legs from shaking.

There were differences, of course. What he feared now was not punishment but disbelief of his report and rejection of his proposal. And as he well knew, the power of the man before him came not from a school board but from the hundreds of millions of dollars at his disposal and from the incredible political influence he had acquired over the years. Influence, of course, was like power and money. Too much was never enough, and Creighton Hull wanted more, always more; and more was what he always seemed to obtain.

Bracher knew on an intellectual level that Hull was not his superior, that they were allies and equals in a great cause; but at the same time, it was difficult not to be deferential to someone whose personal wealth could be expressed by a number with ten digits to the left of the decimal point. And though Hull did not run the Hulltech Center personally on a day-to-day basis, he did

own it. It was his pet project, in fact, and thus every decision regarding new projects had to be cleared with him.

As Hull slowly turned a page of the report he was reading, Bracher thought how deceiving appearances could be. Creighton Hull did not look like an important man, and no outward appearance or manner of behavior testified to the enormous power this man wielded in the economic and political life of the country. This holder of an enormous fortune, this reactionary radical, this racist and anti-Semite resembled nothing so much as a retired office worker or an elderly bureaucrat or the grandfatherly postmaster of a small village. The file folders strewn atop Hull's desk might have been the daily production reports being reviewed by a low-level clerk in a small company. Hull did look suited for that role, with his small round glasses, his balding head fringed with thin white hair, his slightly paunchy stomach, and his pursed lips set in a face upon which eight decades of life had afflicted a mass of wrinkles. Only the labels on the folders indicated that they were progress reports dealing with the various experiments and researches being conducted in the Hulltech Center for Genetic Research during the dark hours of night; and only a man like Bracher, who shared Hull's beliefs and his hatreds, his idealized fantasy of America's past, and his apocalyptic vision of America's future, could know fully what information those files contained.

Hull was a busy man and an active man, his advanced years notwithstanding, and though he and Bracher were associates of many years, the latter still could not just drop in and see him whenever he wanted. Hull's corporate and financial headquarters were in California, and it was in Hull's plush private office on the top floor of his own personal skyscraper in Los Angeles that Bracher now stood and waited for the old man to finish reading the report, after having waited a week for the opportunity to see him at all.

Hull finished reading Bracher's report on the events that had transpired in the holding cell on the third floor of the Center the previous week, then placed the typewritten pages on the desk with a meticulous, almost gentle gesture. He looked up at Bracher and appraised him with his small, inscrutable, reptilian eyes. Bracher waited for his associate to respond to what he had just read. He wondered if Hull could hear his heart pounding.

After a few moments of silence Hull spoke. His voice was soft

and even, but subtly incredulous. "A werewolf, Bracher? You're trying to tell me that you captured a werewolf?"

This was the moment upon which everything else hinged, Bracher thought as he replied, "I know, Mr. Hull, I know. The entire notion is so ridiculous that I didn't believe it either until I saw it with my own eyes. When the police first arrested them, the older one, Blasko, told them about it through an interpreter, and of course I regarded the story as an example of the ignorant superstitions of an inferior race. But even though I'm sure that neither Blasko nor the Gypsy Kaldy understands what really happens when this change occurs, the fact remains that in some way which we don't comprehend, this man Kaldy—"

"I'd always felt our association to be a very satisfactory and productive one, Bracher," Hull interrupted, quite obviously dismissing what Bracher had just been saying. "I'm an old man, and I don't know how much longer I have left to me. I've been thinking for a long while that someone must be designated as my heir, someone other than my idiot niece. I was thinking of you, Bracher, because you and I both see the truth about what is happening in this country. We both know what needs to be done, and I thought that you were the man to do it." He gestured sadly at the file folder he had just set down. "But now you come to me with this! A werewolf, of all things!" He paused, his brow furrowed with concern. "Maybe I've misjudged you."

Bracher chose his words carefully. He knew that he was about to offer Hull evidence that was irrefutable, and he did not wish to put his ally in the position of having either to apologize or to admit that he was wrong. "This whole thing sounds crazy, Mr. Hull, I know that. But I have a videotape, a record of some of the events referred to in my report. You really should watch the tape before we go any further with this."

Hull paused before saying, "And how did this videotape come to be made?"

"Well," Bracher replied, "my initial idea was that this Gypsy was some sort of homicidal maniac whose madness could somehow be turned to our purposes. With that in mind I arranged to tape his behavior when the seizure came upon him, and I also arranged to have my cousin's husband present as an observer. He holds a doctorate in psychology, and he's just received a medical

degree." Bracher paused and, remembering Hull's deeply rooted if eccentric religiosity, added, "He's also a minister."

Hull nodded approvingly. "Has this man been cleared?"

"I didn't see any need for it, Mr. Hull," Bracher said quickly. "I've known him for years."

"And you vouch for him?"

"I vouch for his compliance and his silence." That seemed sufficient, and Hull nodded once again. "We taped this Gypsy Kaldy from shortly before his transformation until he broke out of the cell," Bracher continued. "Lyle Hawkins—he was one of the kids we have working for us—operated the camera until Kaldy attacked us. Hawkins stopped filming at that point and even used the camera tripod as a club against Kaldy." Bracher licked his lips nervously. "Mr. Hull, you're familiar with my record, you know me personally. You must be aware that I am not subject to delusions and that I am emotionally stable. You also know that if I weren't, neither the Marines nor the CIA would have given me a second look. And you also know that if it weren't for the Jews who pull the Agency's strings, I would still be serving as an operative. With all of this in mind, I repeat my request. Please take the time to watch the tape."

Hull gazed long and hard at the younger man, and then, choosing perhaps to indulge him or choosing perhaps to trust his own initial instincts regarding Bracher's worth, he nodded curtly. "Very well. Where is it?"

"My adjutant is waiting outside with it," Bracher said, relieved to have surmounted the first of the obstacles he knew he was to face this day. "I know that you have a television and a VCR here in your office, so if you wouldn't mind . . . ?"

Hull reached over to the control panel on the corner of his desk and pressed a button. The wooden panelling on the wall opposite the desk parted in the middle and slid to the sides, revealing a complex of television monitors and other electronic equipment. Hull sat back in his chair and folded his hands demurely in his lap. "Okay," he said softly. "Go on."

The next few minutes seemed to Bracher to stretch on for an eternity. Briggs brought in the videotape and proceeded to play it for Creighton Hull. Bracher stood by nervously and fidgeted and Hull sat motionless, his face impassive and unreadable as the

image of Janos Kaldy moved about on the television screen and was reflected in the lenses of Hull's bifocals. Bracher sought in vain for any indication of the old man's reaction to what he was seeing.

It was all there, all captured on videotape, from the first wrenching spasm of pain which caused Kaldy to double over, to that moment when the werewolf threw itself against the bars of the cell, at which point Hawkins had stopped operating the video camera. Then the screen was filled with flickering snow as blank tape played through the VCR. Briggs switched off the machine, and Bracher turned to Creighton Hull, awaiting his response.

Hull sat pensively, his thin fingers steepled before his lips. Then he said. "Again."

Bracher nodded to Briggs. The tape was rewound and reshown. The same unfathomable events displayed themselves to Hull.

When the tape had been run through for the second time, Hull said, "Rewind it. I invited Professor Pratt to relax here in California for a week or so, and he's in the building right now. I want him to see this." He reached over to his intercom and instructed his secretary to ask Pratt to come to his office as quickly as possible. Bracher knew that this polite request from Creighton Hull would result in an almost immediate compliance. He was correct in his assumption, for not five minutes had passed, five tense, silent minutes, before Pratt entered the office.

William Henry Pratt was technically the chief administrator of the Hulltech Center, and very few of the staff members knew that Bracher really ran the place. Pratt's credentials were peculiar, and none of them qualified him to oversee any sort of institution, let alone one concerned with scientific research. He had attended five colleges for seven years before finally graduating with a B.S. in anthropology and a grade-point average so low that he was barely able to graduate from the last school before being asked to leave. His studies had been eccentric, eclectic, and uncoordinated, and he had developed his own personal theories of race and ethnicity that made further formal education both impossible and pointless, though his ideas and the articles he wrote for various radical right-wing journals had endeared him to Creighton Hull. Pratt had worked as a part-time instructor at a small private girls' school in Ohio, and had been under investigation for misconduct with some of the adolescent students when Hull discovered him. For a man

so sophisticated in the ways of the world, Hull was curiously naive in intellectual and scientific matters, and he was impressed by Pratt's pseudoscientific speculations about race and biology.

Until Hull decided to use him as a front for Bracher, Pratt had been working on what he hoped would be his life's work, his masterpiece, his great contribution to the world of scientific knowledge: his racial dictionary. Everyone, Pratt believed, had to be classified according to species and race. With the ample financial backing of Creighton Hull, Pratt had kept himself quite busy classifying people all over the world. He had been forced to leave his racial dictionary unfinished because of his obligations at Hulltech, but his own theories were never far from his mind.

Hull was wondering what Pratt would make of Janos Kaldy.

Bracher waited expectantly for Hull's opening remarks to Pratt. He knew from long experience that the old man had a tendency to open discussions in one of two ways, either by expressing an opinion on a subject or by soliciting the opinions of others before expressing his own. If Hull began by telling Pratt what he believed about the subject of this impromptu conference, it would mean that he had already made up his mind on the issue and was merely calling upon a pliant subordinate to agree with him. Bracher was hoping for the other alternative, a request for evaluation and analysis.

"Captain Bracher has brought me a videotape, Professor," Hull said, addressing Pratt with the title he claimed and to which he had no right whatsoever. "It is a record of a most unusual event involving a Gypsy." He paused, and Bracher held his breath. "I want you to watch it and give me your opinion."

Bracher heaved a sigh of relief as the television and VCR were once more switched on and the tape was shown for yet a third time. It is not necessary for Hull to fully believe, he told himself. As long as he recognizes that there is something here that warrants investigation, I will have succeeded; and from that point on, the logic will carry us to my final goal.

When the tape ended, Bracher was pleased to see Pratt gaping in astonishment at what he had just seen. The self-proclaimed race expert removed his thick glasses and wiped his brow with a gray handkerchief. There was a quality to Pratt that Bracher found repulsive. Perhaps it was the perpetual sheen of grease and sweat on the rolls of fat, or perhaps it was the way in which the small

eyes were enveloped by the flesh of his cheeks when he smiled. Whatever Pratt's ethnic background might be, and Bracher did not doubt that it was acceptable, the professor's physique was nonetheless far from the racial ideal. But Bracher reminded himself that this fat pig was held in high esteem by Hull, and would be a valuable ally if an ally were needed. Hull allowed the professor a few moments in which to compose himself, and then asked, "Well? Is it possible?"

Pratt cleared his throat. "Pardon me for asking this, Mr. Hull, but is there any possibility that this tape has been tampered with, falsified in some way?"

Hull looked at Bracher for a response, and Bracher shook his head vigorously. "Absolutely not, Professor. I personally witnessed the events you just saw. I was there when the tape was made."

Pratt nodded and pursed his lips contemplatively. He knew Bracher quite well, professionally, of course, not personally, and he had no doubts about the former Marine captain's devotion to the awesome task of the racial purification of the United States. "In that case, Mr. Hull, all I can say is that it's utterly impossible but obviously true."

Hull's face betrayed nothing. "Any speculations, Professor?"

Pratt's brow furrowed as he replied, "There are analogues in nature, Mr. Hull, imperfect but perhaps useful. What we have here is apparently some sort of spontaneous genetic mutation, affecting the cell structure of this creature down to the molecular level of the cells. The Gypsies are, of course, a lower life form —subhuman, like the Asiatics—but their physical similarity to humans has protected them from the type of research necessary to an understanding of their biological structures."

"You just mentioned analogues in nature," Hull said. "Such as?"

"Well, common things such as the metamorphosis of the caterpillar into the butterfly or the tadpole into the frog."

"But this transformation," Bracher broke in, "is periodic and appears to reverse itself."

"Are you certain of this?" Pratt asked.

"Reasonably certain," Bracher replied. "Not absolutely certain. All we're sure of at the moment is that the change occurred. We don't know how or why."

Pratt nodded again, assimilating this. "We must study this creature, of course, dissect him if need be."

"I'd advise against that, except as a last resort," Bracher said, turning to Hull. "We may never have such a specimen to study again, and it would be a great loss to our science were we to kill him unnecessarily."

"He must be classified," Pratt muttered. "I tend to believe that he is not a Gypsy at all, but rather some other form of lower pseudohuman, like the African Negroes or the American aborigines. Maybe we should just list him as a lycanthropos."

"Again, Professor?" Hull asked, cocking his head in Pratt's direction.

"A lycanthropos," he repeated. "It's Greek. It means wolfman, literally. Lycanthropia has been recognized by some psychologists as a personality disorder which—"

"I don't want to take issue with you, Professor," Bracher said, "but this goes a bit beyond being just a personality disorder."

"Oh, yes, it certainly does," Pratt agreed.

"Gentlemen," Hull said with a tone of finality, "we must do the following things. First, Bracher, you must find this man once again. Will that present a problem?"

"No, Mr. Hull," Bracher replied. "I already have a plan to do just that."

"Good. Once he's been captured, he must be studied." Hull stood up behind his desk, and Bracher remarked to himself, as he so often had when dealing with Hull, how incongruous it seemed for such a small and delicate man to possess so much power. "I think we're all satisfied with the progress we've been making at the Center in our genetics experiments. But in the long run, breaking the stranglehold the inferior races have on the nation must go hand in hand with our efforts in selectively breeding superior humans. We must carry on the work of the S.S. that was interrupted by Germany's defeat. We must recreate that Aryan people which once dominated the globe before they were polluted and degraded by the nonwhites and the Jews. For this, an extension of our understanding of genetics is of vital importance. We may stand to learn quite a bit about the process of gene mutation from this creature."

Bracher took a deep breath. Now is the time, he thought. "Mr.

Hull, capturing and studying this creature is important for the eugenics program, but there are other reasons as well."

Hull's eyebrows raised quizzically. "Such as?" Now that he had chosen to accept at face value what Bracher had told him, he was receptive to anything else his associate might have to say.

"As you recall from my report," Bracher went on, "the police records indicate that this Kaldy managed to kill two dozen heavily armed men with his bare hands. He tore them to shreds, in fact."

"As you reported," Hull agreed, his face and tone as unrevealing as ever.

"On the night he broke out of the cell at the Center, one of the whips emptied a shotgun into him from a distance of no more than six feet." Bracher paused for dramatic effect. "Kaldy wasn't even scratched."

Hull's expressionless eyes glimmered slightly. "Yes," he mused. "You noted that. Uninjured by the guards."

Bracher leaned forward and spoke in hushed, almost conspiratorial tones. "Invulnerable. Consider the implications, Mr. Hull. Totally invulnerable."

Hull nodded, intrigued by the direction Bracher was leading him and slightly amused by his associate's melodramatics. "Continue, Bracher, by all means." Hull sat back down behind his desk.

"Consider it from this perspective, Mr. Hull," Bracher said enthusiastically. "It is reasonable to assume that whatever it is that happens to Kaldy, whatever explanation there is for it, it must be chemical, basically chemical. If we can unravel the chemical process that causes this to happen to him, maybe we can isolate it. And if we can isolate it, maybe then we can replicate it!"

Hull leaned forward. "Replicate it? What are you . . . ?" And then Creighton Hull smiled, looking for all the world like an ancient child who has just discovered a new toy. "Replicate it! Induce it?"

"Yes!" Bracher said. "Induce it, control it, seek to learn to eliminate the madness that seems to go along with the change."

"And if the chemical process involved can be replicated and induced," Hull mused, "we could subject some of our own people to the process."

"Yes, yes, precisely, precisely!" Bracher nodded. "We could create an invulnerable army!"

Hull began to laugh. "We would have to make certain, of course, that we can make them invulnerable without turning them into werewolves!" Bracher joined in his laughter.

Pratt coughed, a prelude to saying, "Mr. Hull, the research and experimentation such a project would require will . . . well, it will take years."

Hull's laughter subsided and then he shook his head. "Don't misunderstand us, Professor, and don't let my whimsy mislead you. I no more believe in werewolves than I do in ghosts, vampires, or spacemen, and I don't believe in invulnerable monsters any more than I believe in elves or leprechauns. But lots of ignorant beliefs probably have their roots in scientific fact, and we may have an opportunity here to uncover the truth about this particular superstition. After all, Professor, it's clear that there is some physical process at work here which makes this Gypsy very difficult to injure, and which causes a rather drastic physical change. And if we can discover the biology of this phenomenon, it may have a profound impact upon our struggle in the years to come. But" —he turned to Bracher—"I am not willing to commit too many of our trustworthy researchers to a project which is still only theoretical."

"I understand perfectly, Mr. Hull," Bracher said. "I have a suggestion to make, if I might. My cousin Louisa Neville is able to converse with Kaldy's companion in some barbaric alpine tongue they both know. She can assist me in interrogation. And as I've already mentioned, her husband, John, is a physician and has studied psychology. If there are psychological factors involved, he may be able to discover them, and he can also see to the physical well-being of the prisoners for as long as we choose to keep them alive."

Hull frowned slightly. "Bracher, we have too many enemies to take any risks with security. Are you sure you can trust these people? Are they sympathetic to our goals? Are they . . . well, are they our kind of people?"

Bracher laughed softly. "John Neville is easily controlled. He's sympathetic to anything that keeps him and his wife alive and well, so he'll do what I tell him to do. His wife, my cousin Louisa, is unalterably hostile to us and everything we stand for."

Hull's frown deepened. "But then—"

"I have her under lock and key at the Center," Bracher said,

cutting short Hull's objections. "She's under constant guard. As long as I hold her, Neville will do what he's told."

"But what about later on?" Hull asked. "What then?"

Bracher shrugged. "When we don't need them anymore, I'll give them an opportunity to join our movement of their own free will. If they choose not to, then I'll just have them both eliminated."

Hull considered this. "Your own cousin, Bracher?"

"She's a traitor to her race," he replied blandly. "She's an enemy. And her husband is a spineless idiot. At the moment he's a useful spineless idiot, but if I decide that he'll be a danger when his usefulness is done with, I'll just get rid of him."

"Okay," Hull agreed with a curt nod. "So you'll have those two. What else will you need, initially, at least?"

"If I can have the services of some research scientists, chemists, and biologists, I think that I'll have an adequate team for the basic research."

Hull frowned. "That might be difficult. We have many projects under way at the moment, and I'm reluctant to interrupt any of them . . ." He thought for a moment. "But this discovery of yours interests me, Bracher. Perhaps Dr. Raymore can spare one of his chemists for a short time."

"I'd like to be involved in this project, Captain," Pratt said quickly.

"Of course, Professor, of course," Bracher responded. "That goes without saying." Pratt smiled contentedly as Bracher turned back to Hull. "It's difficult to say what we'll learn or how quickly we can make progress, especially if we have only one research scientist working on the project, but the sooner we begin . . ."

"Understood." Hull nodded. "I'll instruct Raymore to send you one of his chemists. Professor, you know the staff better than Bracher or I do. You help Raymore make the choice." Hull turned back to Bracher. "When do you anticipate recapturing the Gypsy?"

"On the first night of the next full moon, if all goes as planned," Bracher replied.

"Good," Hull said, rising to his feet to indicate that the meeting was at an end. "Professor, I know that you expected to stay here in California for the next week, but under the circumstances I

think you should go with Captain Bracher when he returns to Mannering. And, Bracher, keep me very closely posted."

Bracher and Pratt left Hull's office a few moments later, Pratt to make preparations for his return to North Dakota and Bracher to spend a few hours at the first bar he could find. Between the nervousness of anticipation, and the tension of the meeting, and the elation resulting from his success, he needed a drink very badly.

Besides, he had to take some time to think. Now that he had committed himself to recapturing Kaldy, he had to figure out a way to do it.

5

The people of Mexico have suffered much in their long history. Aztec tyranny, Spanish conquest, revolution and chaos, American invasions, political corruption, economic depression and demographic pressures that seem at times to strain their society to the breaking point. Basically a calm and optimistic people, the exigencies of life sometimes have driven them to acts of desperation. This is true of all peoples, of course; but for one particular Mexican, the unhappy, desperate life into which she had been drawn seemed fated to end before its appointed time.

Dr. Carlaisle Raymore was not thinking about such things as he bent over the only marginally conscious bound figure on the operating table in one of the many rooms on the third floor of the Hulltech Center. He was wondering why this particular Mexican, Corazón Rivera, had blond hair and blue eyes.

"Spontaneous mutation?" he muttered pensively. "Or possibly some small element of Aryan blood, brought to the surface by chance." It had been Corazón's fair hair and eyes, contrasting so starkly with her dark skin, that had attracted the attention of one of the whips sent out around the country periodically to kidnap society's dregs for use in Hulltech's secret research. Corazón had been eking out a meager living as a prostitute on the streets of San Diego when she was drugged and abducted and sent to Hulltech to serve as a test subject for whatever experiments she might be deemed suitable.

"Remarkable," Raymore muttered. "A blond-haired, blue-eyed Mexican. Quite unique."

"Pardon, Doctor?" his assistant asked. She was a petite young woman, strikingly beautiful in a more Mediterranean than Nordic manner, with high cheekbones, aristocratic features, and jet-black hair pulled tightly back into a bun.

Raymore sighed. "Sometimes, Petra, I fear that all my research is futile. The inferior breeds have been absorbing white blood and have been polluting the white gene pool with their own genes for centuries." He shook his head. "I sometimes doubt that we'll ever be able to straighten it all out, filter out the lower elements, isolate and propagate the superior ones. The task seems impossible."

"It certainly seems like a long-range project," Petra Loewenstein agreed. "Generations, at least."

"We've had paradoxes like this one before," he said pensively, "though never with someone who is so obviously of Indian descent. We come across blond-haired, blue-eyed cross-breeds. Are they mutations or are they exhibiting recessive characteristics in their own genetic structures?" He sighed again and shook his head. "Ah, well. It's foolish to fret and whine while there's so much work to be done. It seems almost a pity to waste this creature on a test that I'm certain will fail, but Pratt is coming here today, and the test results have to be ready for him." He nodded to Petra and said, "Proceed."

The young chemist lifted the hypodermic needle up to the light and flicked it with her finger to drive any air bubbles to the top, then depressed the plunger slightly to eliminate any air that had risen to the needle tip. She thrust the needle into Corazón Rivera's arm and emptied its contents into her bloodstream. She glanced at her watch. "Time, two-thirty-two precisely." She wrote the time in the open notebook that lay on the nearby desk.

The injection was given at thirty-two minutes after two A.M. At thirty-three minutes after two, Corazón Rivera began to writhe as the pain roused her from her stupor, and at thirty-four minutes after two she was dead.

Raymore nodded with satisfaction. "As I suspected. Professor Pratt was incorrect. Indians do *not* have a waste-elimination system which differs from that of true humans. Injecting concentrated urea into their blood *does* cause death. We can thus conclude that their peculiar body odor must have another cause." He turned to his assistant. "Make careful note of that, Petra."

Raymore and his assistants had been carefully recording the results of their experiments ever since they had begun their work at Hulltech under the supervision of Bracher and Pratt a year before. Bracher had organized the "specimen acquisition," as he

called it, making certain that the victims used for experimental purposes were kidnapped in various places far from North Dakota to make it impossible to connect the disappearances with the Center. Pratt had been an early supporter of the idea of building the Center, and it was his support which had brought Hull around to seeing the value of the research. They had a responsibility, he had told the old man, to expand their scientific knowledge both of genetics and human biology. Eliminating the unfit and the inferior after the upcoming victory in the race war would not be enough. The earlier work of the German S.S. must be continued. The white race must be bred into a race of gods.

And so the boundaries of human knowledge had been steadily expanding under the careful scrutiny of Raymore and his assistant chemists and biologists, of whom Petra Loewenstein was the most recent to join the team. They had posed and then answered many questions in their work at Hulltech. It had been so long since the conquest of the Third Reich that Raymore had decided, just to be safe, to repeat the experiments of Mengele and the others at Auschwitz so as to verify the data which had survived. Precisely how long does it take a naked man to freeze to death unsheltered in the depths of winter? Which best counteracts hypothermia, human body heat, animal body heat, or artificial heat? What is the precise pressure required to crush a human skull? When equal force is exerted in pulling legs in opposite directions away from the body, how long does it take for the limbs to separate from the pelvis, and what level of force is required, and does the right or left leg separate first, and is this related to the right- or left-handedness of the subject?

They had vivisected numerous pregnant women of various inferior races in successive stages of pregnancy to see if the point could be discovered at which fetal development began so deceptively to approximate that of humans. They had injected blue dye into eyes to see if eye color was alterable. They had measured the effect of relative degrees of heat upon skin, noting the precise temperature and exposure length required before the epidermis began to blister. They had experimented with sterilization processes, reasoning that after the national takeover a cheap and efficient means would have to be found to stop the blacks and Hispanics from breeding. They had removed eyes and ears and tongues and had amputated hands and feet and arms and legs to

see if there were conditions under which these same races were similar to other lower life forms, such as lizards, in the ability to regenerate lost tissue.

So much work left to be done, Raymore often thought, and so little time in which to do it. But, ever loyal and dedicated to learning, he had steeled himself to his task and had continued to press on.

The door of the laboratory was opened by the guard outside, and Professor Pratt waddled in, smiling broadly and holding his hand out toward Raymore. "Doctor!" Pratt said cheerfully. "I'm sorry I'm late. I was doing some paperwork and I just lost all track of time."

"Oh, no problem, Professor," Raymore said, smiling and shaking the proffered hand. "I didn't know when you would be arriving, so I went ahead without you." He nodded at the corpse on the operating table. "I'm afraid you owe me that beer you wagered. Urea is toxic to the Indians."

Pratt frowned. "Really?"

"I'm afraid so." Raymore nodded, still smiling, happy at having won the friendly wager. "It look less than three minutes."

The professor shrugged. "Ah, well. It seemed like a good possibility to me, but of course I was just speculating. I guess I can't argue with the results of an experiment."

" 'Fraid not," Raymore agreed. He gestured at Petra and said, "Have you met Miss Loewenstein?"

Pratt turned to the young woman and smiled. "My pleasure, miss."

"Professor," Petra replied, shaking his hand and noting that his handshake was weak and liquid.

"I have made careful records of everything we've been doing with the Indians since our conference last month," Raymore said. "I think that you will find the results interesting. Some of the Indians, especially the ones from Mexico and the banana states, seem to have absorbed a great deal of Aryan blood over the centuries. Of course, the people of northern Spain were—"

"Yes, yes, in a moment," Pratt interrupted. "Before we get into all that, I have some special material, a police report and a report written by Captain Bracher. Mr. Hull wants you to read it. There's a special order for you from him as well." He reached into the inner pocket of his heavy overcoat and pulled out a thick

manila envelope. He handed it to Raymore and said, "We're starting a new project, Doctor, a fascinating new project."

"Really," Raymore replied as he opened the envelope and unfolded the enclosed papers. His eyebrows rose as he read the reports and Hull's message, and then he asked, "Is this serious, Professor? Is this true?"

"I've seen the tape with my own eyes, Doctor," Pratt answered. "There's no doubt about it. Captain Bracher's report is accurate."

Raymore emitted a low whistle. "I'd give a year's pay to get my hands on this man."

"No doubt, no doubt," Pratt said, "but Mr. Hull doesn't want to commit too much of our research attention to this until he is certain that it's worth pursuing. Bracher will be in charge of the project, and I'll be acting as expert consultant for the time being. I'm sure that if we see results quickly, the entire project will be transferred to you. But at the moment, all we require from you is a chemist to assist Dr. Neville, or Reverend Neville, or whatever he calls himself."

"Dr. Neville? I don't think I've heard his name mentioned before."

"He's married to Captain Bracher's cousin Louisa. He's an M.D. and has a degree in psychology."

"And he's a minister?" Raymore asked. Pratt nodded affirmatively. "That's impressive. So many degrees . . ."

Pratt shrugged. "We both know how easy it is to get university degrees, and how little they really mean." He tried not to sound defensive of his borderline bachelor's degree and total lack of graduate work.

Raymore dropped the papers on the desk and began to pace up and down. "I'm not sure which of my people is best qualified for this sort of research," he muttered. "Belser, perhaps. He's the closest thing I have to a specialist in spontaneous gene mutation. He might be what Captain Bracher needs . . ."

As Raymore contemplated which of his assistants he could spare for the next few months, Petra Loewenstein surrendered to her curiosity and looked down at the papers. She strained in an attempt to read them without being too obvious about it, but then her face blanched when she saw the word "werewolf" and she eagerly picked up the papers. Her hands trembled as she studied them intently.

Pratt grabbed the pages from her and said with undisguised annoyance, "These papers are private, miss!"

She did not respond to his words. Instead she looked at Raymore and said earnestly, "Doctor, you must transfer me to this project, you simply must!"

"Now, Petra," Raymore began, "this requires someone with more experience than you have, someone with particular expertise in the—"

"Please, Doctor, read my personal file," she interrupted. "We're thoroughly investigated by Mr. Hull before we're hired, we both know that, so I know that my file must contain stronger arguments than I could make myself. You'll see that I've had some experience with genetics." She paused. "You'll also see that I have personal reasons for wanting to join this research team."

"Petra, I can't spare you here," Raymore said firmly. "Our work with the Indians—"

"Can be continued by any one of a number of chemists," she finished for him. "Please, Doctor, take the time to read my file. Please!"

Raymore hesitated for a moment, then said, "Well, okay. Sure. If you'll excuse me, Professor?"

Pratt shrugged. "As you wish." He watched as Raymore left the room to go to his office, and then he turned to Petra. "Miss Loewenstein, I must say that I don't like the way you talk to your supervisor."

She lowered her eyes. "I guess I was a little rude. I'm sorry, Professor, really I am. But I simply *must* work on this project, I simply *must*!"

He appraised her, noting with lascivious interest her flawless skin and trim, athletic figure. Pratt walked over to her and said, "The final decision will be mine, of course."

"I understand, Professor," she said. "I'd be really grateful to you for this opportunity. I've always been fascinated by the process of mutation. It's sort of a special interest of mine, you see."

He nodded understandingly and then, without any needless preliminaries, placed his right hand on her rump and began to move it back and forth across her buttocks. He felt her body stiffen slightly, but she made no effort to move away from him. "Yes, I see," he said. "I am certain you would be grateful for the

transfer.'' He moved his left hand to her breasts and explored them roughly.

Petra suppressed the urge to spit in his face, and forced herself to smile. ''Yes, very grateful, Professor.'' She shut her eyes tightly and did her best to feign enthusiasm as Pratt pulled her body tightly to his and pressed his fat, sweaty lips against her mouth. His tongue forced its way between her teeth, his breath smelling of old pizza and stale beer. Petra tensed her body, ordering herself not to retch.

The door opened and Raymore walked in, intently reading the contents of a file folder. Pratt released the young woman immediately and stepped back, so that when Raymore looked up he saw nothing out of the ordinary. ''I think that Miss Loewenstein will do,'' Pratt said.

''Yes, yes, I tend to agree,'' Raymore said, nodding. ''Why don't you just go on down to my office, Professor, and I'll be there in a minute. I have a bottle of wine I've been saving to share with you.''

''Certainly, certainly,'' Pratt agreed, waddling out of the room. ''I look forward to working with you, miss,'' he said innocently as he exited.

Raymore attached no significance to the fact that Petra was vigorously wiping her mouth as he said, ''I had read your records when you first came to work here, of course, but I had never given any thought to these facts.'' He looked at her, saying in a sad and sympathetic tone, ''Both parents.''

''Yes, Doctor,'' she said quietly.

He shook his head. ''A horrible way to die.''

''Yes, Doctor.'' Her face was an impassive, stoic mask.

He paused again and then said, ''Petra, it isn't likely that there is any connection, you know. And the testimony of a terrified, traumatized child—''

''My memory is quite clear, Doctor. And I must work on this project, whether a connection exists or not.''

He nodded. ''I understand completely. But I hope that you understand that personal considerations must never interfere with scientific objectivity or devotion to duty.''

''Of course I understand that, Doctor,'' she said, bristling slightly. ''I am a scientist, after all!''

''Yes, yes, of course you are,'' he said kindly. He closed the

file folder, tossed it on the desk, and then walked to the door. "Well, make certain that this room is cleaned up, will you? I have to go keep the professor company."

"Yes, Doctor," she said. "I'll attend to it immediately." It was left to her as lab assistant to see to the disposal of the corpse and the cleanup of the waste the body had evacuated as the onslaught of death released the sphincter; but first Petra Loewenstein had to attend to two other matters.

First she took her dossier from the desk and, removing the photostat of a particularly interesting police report, folded it and placed it in the pocket of her lab coat.

Then she left the laboratory and went to the ladies' room, where she spent the next few minutes vigorously rinsing out her mouth, determined to eliminate the residual taste of Pratt's kiss. "Fat pig," she muttered, and then spit into the sink.

6

The smooth, antiseptic walls of the holding cells on the third floor of the Hulltech Center had rarely echoed the sounds of laughter in the years since they were built, but the family comedy that Louisa Neville was relating to Blasko was causing the old man to chuckle loudly. Bracher had returned to Mannering and had given John Neville details of both his conversation with Hull and the ultimate purpose of the newly designated "Project Lycanthropos," with the clear order that he was to confide the information to no one. Neville, shocked and horrified at the nature of the activity into which he was being conscripted, had immediately thereafter told Louisa everything Bracher had told him. Louisa then proceeded to push her way past Briggs, burst into her cousin's office unannounced, and tell him precisely what she thought of him, his plans, and his boss. Bracher had then summoned Neville and had turned the full blast of his anger on him. Blasko found himself laughing at the young woman's description of the confrontation and at the picture of the combination of Neville's embarrassed discomfort, Louisa's furious disapproval, and Bracher's withering sarcasm.

Blasko was sitting on the stool in his otherwise empty cell, eating a bowl of stew and a thick hunk of grainy black bread. Those unfortunates who fell into the hands of the researcher at Hulltech rarely ate well, if they ate at all, but Blasko's continued if temporary survival was a component in the experiment Bracher hoped to begin within a few days, and so the old Gypsy was grudgingly afforded some stale bread and a stew consisting of lukewarm broth and a gristly meat of uncertain origin. To someone like Blasko, accustomed to eating whatever sustenance came his way, the food was welcome and nourishing.

Louisa finished her anecdote, remarking to herself that she and Blasko were having less and less difficulty communicating with each other in their Italian/Romansch conversations, and watched as the Gypsy wiped the bowl dry with the bread, which he then popped into his mouth. "*Grashia, donna*," Blasko said. "My people spend much time telling tales around the fire at night, so I know a good storyteller when I meet one." He smiled warmly. "You should have been born a Gypsy."

Louisa accepted the intended compliment by returning his smile and nodding slightly, and then she asked, "How can you still laugh, Mr. Blasko? After all that has happened and after I've told you what they're planning to do, how can you still laugh?"

"*Donna*, I am alive, I am sheltered, and I am eating. I had expected to be dead on the night when they locked me in here with Janos, and yet here I am, alive, sheltered, eating. So when you tell me a funny tale, why shouldn't I laugh?" Then, as an afterthought, "And please, *donna*, I am not *Mr.* Blasko. I am Blasko, simply Blasko."

She smiled at him once again. "Very well. You can be Blasko if I can be Louisa."

The old man shook his head. "No, *donna*, no. It would not be proper for me to address you as an equal."

Louisa's nostrils flared suddenly. "Blasko, if you've come to know me at all over these past few weeks, you must know that I do *not* believe the blasphemous racist nonsense of the madmen around here!"

"*Donna*—" Blasko began, taken slightly aback by her vehemence.

"You *are* my equal, Blasko! All of God's children are brothers and sisters!"

"*Pairei faviori, ma donna!*" Blasko laughed. "I wasn't talking about your people and mine! You are a fine lady, a nurse, and the wife of a holy man. And I am just a poor wanderer. It would be unthinkable for me to address you by your given name."

Louisa blushed slightly. "I'm sorry, Blasko. I'm just so accustomed to hearing people talk about . . . well, it doesn't matter. I'm sorry." She paused and frowned, wrinkling her smooth forehead. "And as for my husband being a holy man . . . well, I don't know. He says that we don't have any choice, that if we

don't play along with Frederick we'll both be killed. I'm sure he believes what he's saying, and I'm sure he thinks he's protecting us both, but . . ."

Blasko shrugged. "You are perhaps too harsh in judging your husband. I do not envy him his position."

"I'm sure that he doesn't envy you yours either," she replied, "and I can't help but think that that's his real motive. He's afraid, pure and simple."

"No, *donna,* it is the point. He does not wish to exchange places with me. Do you blame him? I bear him no ill will, and my people are the ones who suffer from your . . ." He paused, aware that this poor woman felt responsible for things she could not control. ". . . from the cruelty of . . . these people. If I can understand your husband's fears and forgive him for them, certainly you can do the same."

She shook her head. "Maybe it's unfair of me, Mr. Blasko, but I just can't. At least my cousin has the excuse of ignorant fanaticism. My husband's only excuse is the fear of death."

He laughed. "*Donna,* the fear of death is the best excuse there is!"

She began to grow heated again. "Frederick and his people are evil, sick, and dangerous, and John seems willing to help them just to save his own skin. Is life so sweet that it's worth doing something like that?"

Blasko shook his head, grinning at her. "No, *donna,* no. You are right. There are times when life is not sweet at all. There are people for whom life is a burden and death a distant goal."

She knew, of course, to whom he was referring. "People such as Kaldy."

"Yes." He nodded. "Such as poor Janos."

Louisa thought for a few moments before speaking. "Blasko, what is wrong with him? I know what he did, and I know what I think I saw, but I don't understand it. What really is wrong with him?"

"He is a werewolf," Blasko replied simply.

"No, no, I mean . . . I mean, what is the . . . oh, I don't know . . . what is the cause of his . . . of his disease?"

"He is not diseased, *donna,*" Blasko said. "He is cursed. He is plagued."

"My cousin and my husband are correct in one thing at least,"

she objected. "There must be some sort of chemical problem involved, something measurable and understandable. This is the twentieth century, after all. We've become civilized enough and educated enough to realize that the old superstitions are . . . are just superstitions."

Blasko looked at her for a few moments and then allowed his tired old eyes to drift from wall to wall in his prison before saying, "And how civilized has mankind become, *donna*? I am just an ignorant man, but even I know that mankind has become more ignorant than I and more cruel than Janos."

She lowered her eyes. "I know. I know. But just because there are evil, crazy people who do terrible things . . . well, that doesn't mean that we all have to retreat a thousand years and start believing in curses and devils."

"But you saw—"

"I know what I *think* I saw, Blasko, but I don't understand it." She smiled at him. "Come now. You don't really believe in supernatural creatures, do you? Honestly? Don't you believe that a rational explanation, a scientific explanation—?"

"*Donna,*" he interrupted, sighing softly, "Janos has not changed, has not aged, in all the time I have known him, and I have known him for forty-five years."

"Forty-five years!" she exclaimed. "But that's impossible! He can't be more than twenty-five years old right now."

"I do not know how old Janos is, *donna*. Fifty years, a hundred years . . . I have no idea. All I know is that for the past forty-five years he has not aged, and that for the past forty-five years I have been his keeper."

Her eyes widened. "His keeper. Is that why he didn't injure you that night when he killed all those boys, the ones whose bodies are in the freezer? And when he escaped from this place, he didn't try to find you or attack you either. Was that the reason, that you've . . . you've 'kept' him all these years?"

"Oh, no, that is not why at all," Blasko said. "When the wolf possesses him he has no awareness of his other self. He has no human thoughts or memories."

"But then why . . . ?"

"The flower of the sleeping wolf, *donna,* the flower of the sleeping wolf. A plant that has the power to restrain him. For forty-five years I have been binding Janos with chains on every

night of the full moon and then weaving sprigs of the plant into the links of the chains. When the change comes upon him, the plant weakens him so that he cannot break free of the chains."

"And you had this plant with you?" she asked.

"The night when Janos killed those young men, yes, but I was not able to bind the chains tightly enough before the change came over him. The plant protected me, but I was not able to tie the flowers to Janos." The old Gypsy paused in thought for a moment and then went on, "There was another time, about two years ago, I think it was. I was ill, so terribly ill that I thought I would die. I was weak and feverish and unable to attend to Janos. He left me with the plant to protect me, but he wouldn't stay anywhere near me or the others of my tribe. None of the others would come near him so close to the time of the change, so he tried to bind himself with the plant, but he didn't do it well enough. He killed a group of young people that night. They had been camping in the woods for the weekend, the newspaper said." Blasko shook his head. "And the night Janos escaped from this prison, that night I was just lucky, as you and your husband and the captain were lucky. Janos wanted to escape confinement more than he wanted to kill us, and so he fled and left us alive." Blasko paused. "But those were the only three times—the night he killed those young bullies in the woods, the night he killed the campers, and the night he escaped from this prison. Except for those three times, Janos has not killed for forty-five years."

She nodded. "And it was coincidence that when you were finally arrested, he was arrested too?"

"Again, no, *donna*. Janos sought me out. He knew that I would wait for him at the place where the change came over him, and so he returned to me there. The American policemen came just a few minutes later."

"How did he know that you would wait for him? Why would he want to go back to you if you kept him in chains? I don't understand."

"I am his keeper, as I told you. He is not a bad man, my friend Janos. He does not wish to kill, and I have been able to keep him from killing for most of the time we have been together. Until recently, he has not killed anyone since he killed my wife and my daughter."

Louisa's mouth dropped open. "He killed your family?"

Blasko nodded. "Yes, *donna,* that is how we met."

She shook her head. "That's horrible! I'm so terribly sorry, Mr. Blasko."

He nodded, accepting her sympathy. "It was many years ago, *donna,* and pain fades with time. I tried to kill him at first, of course. Nothing worked, not even the silver bullet we have been told of. And then he asked me to become his keeper and I agreed. I reasoned that if I could not kill him, at least I could keep him from doing to anyone else what he did to my Visha and our little Lura."

Louisa looked into Blasko's eyes sympathetically. "It must have been very hard for you, seeing him every day, being with him all the time, knowing what he did."

"It was hard for a long while," he agreed, nodding. "But I have come to understand Janos, even to pity him. He can't help being what he is, can't help doing what he does. He is a werewolf, *donna*. He is cursed. There is no other explanation."

Louisa's reply was cut short by the approaching sound of boots clicking on the stone floor of the corridor outside the cell. She and Blasko looked over toward the sound and Louisa frowned as the grinning face of her cousin came into view. "Good evening, Louisa," Bracher said cheerfully. "I trust you and our friend here have been having an enjoyable conversation?"

"Whatever Blasko . . . Mr. Blasko," she corrected herself, determined to afford the Gypsy the dignity of a polite address, at least when discussing him with her cousin, "whatever Mr. Blasko and I have been talking about is certainly none of your business, Frederick."

"Ah, but I disagree, Louisa," Bracher responded. "And Mr. Hull disagrees as well, as you know."

"Hull can disagree all he wants, Frederick," she spit. "I couldn't care less." Three of Bracher's young punks came up behind him in the corridor and Louisa blanched slightly, suddenly fearing that her cousin had decided to murder Blasko. "What . . . ?" she began.

Surmising her apprehension, Bracher laughed softly. "Don't worry, cuz. Our Gypsy friend isn't going to his final reward just yet. But he is going to make a contribution this evening to our little project." He nodded curtly to one of his men, who unlocked the cell and then entered it. He clamped a pair of handcuffs roughly

onto Blasko's wrists and then pulled the old man to his feet and pushed him from the cell. Flanked by two sneering but silent whips and prodded from behind by the third, Blasko was hustled down the corridor.

Louisa rose from the stool. "What are you doing, Frederick? Where are you taking him?"

"We're going on a little hunting expedition," Bracher replied, smiling. "Have you ever gone hunting, Louisa?"

"Of course not," she said. "I don't see how anyone can enjoy killing animals." She paused. "Or killing anything else, for that matter."

"Oh, you're so moral, Louisa," her cousin observed sarcastically. "But I don't recall ever seeing you refuse to eat meat. Do you think that filet mignon comes from suicidal cows?"

"I don't object to killing animals, Frederick. I just object to enjoying it."

He pretended to consider the comment. "An interesting distinction, though I doubt it makes much difference to the animal. In any event, when hunting certain dangerous carnivores, one method of bringing them within range is to stake out a prey animal to attract them. Our friend Blasko is the prey animal, and we are, of course, hunting a werewolf."

"You wouldn't!" she exclaimed, horrified and disgusted. "You've seen what that creature can do! You can't just—"

"Relax, Louisa. We're not finished with Blasko yet. My purpose is to capture the werewolf, not feed it."

"But then how—?"

"Trust me, my dear cousin," he interrupted her, relishing her discomfort. "This has all been carefully planned. And the element of risk should encourage our Gypsy here to cooperate with us." He turned and began to follow after his men, saying over his shoulder, "I suggest you wait back in your quarters, all alone, I'm sorry to say. I'm afraid that your husband is otherwise engaged."

"Frederick!" she called after him, but he was already gone. She ran after him, but a guard was blocking the door through which her cousin had exited, and she had no choice but to return to the room that had been assigned to her and her husband. Louisa walked slowly down the corridor toward her room, followed of course by the young whip who had been ordered to keep an eye

on her. She alternately wept and gritted her teeth, filled with anger and sorrow and worry and dread. She entered the room and locked the door behind her.

She was as much a prisoner as Blasko, for her cousin had made it very clear that she and her husband would be—how had he put it?—cared for until a later date. That later date might never come, she well knew. That later date might be, probably *would* be, the day when they were both shot in the back of the head without warning. Until then, she and John were restricted to the third floor of Hulltech, isolated from the world of sanity by a computer-coded elevator, by stairways sealed with locked steel fire doors, by an absence of telephones, by virtually unbreakable one-way windows, and by the ubiquitous presence of Bracher's whip thugs. Both of their lives were hostage to John's cooperation with Frederick's madness.

And underlying Louisa's fear and anger was the depressing, horrible suspicion that her husband had a motive other than simple fear. John had always been a scholar and a thinker, collecting degree after degree as another man might collect stamps, approaching sin and suffering and the many dimensions of the human condition from the perspective of intellectual abstraction, somehow oddly and a bit coldly removed from true empathy.

Louisa knew her husband well, well enough to suspect that Neville was not simply afraid, well enough to fear that he was also uncontrollably curious about Janos Kaldy. The implications of that curiosity sent shivers up her spine.

Louisa lay back on the bed in her quarters, determined to rest. It was no use. Finally she sat on the edge of the bed and fretted, watching the hands of the large clock on the wall turn slowly in their circuits.

Outside, in front of the main entrance of the Hulltech Center, a black limousine and an olive-green troop-transport truck waited with idling motors as Blasko was deposited in the front seat of the limousine beside the driver, who gave him a disgusted look and then ignored him. Captain Bracher entered the rear of the automobile and sat beside William Pratt. John Neville had been told to seat himself in the fold-down seat that faced the rear window, and his hands fidgeted nervously as he asked, "Frederick, where are we going?"

Bracher ignored the question. Instead he leaned forward toward the driver and snapped his fingers. The driver responded by handing him an envelope and a pen, which Bracher then tossed to Neville. "Here. Sign this letter."

Neville looked at the envelope. "This is addressed to the Synodical Board of Missions! What do you have to do with—?"

"It's a letter of resignation," Bracher said brusquely as the driver put the car in gear and then began to drive away from the Center, the troop-transport truck following close behind. "That jungle-bunny church of yours has been trying to find out why you and Louisa never showed up in . . . what was it, Tarzania or something?"

"Namibia. The mission church is in a village about three hundred miles from—"

"Whatever," Bracher interrupted. "The point is that we don't want them to begin any inconvenient inquiries."

Neville took the letter from the envelope and read it quickly. "Frederick, wait a minute here! This says that I'm resigning from the ministry!"

"Sign the letter, John."

"But I have no intention of—"

Bracher fixed his icy blue eyes on his wife's cousin and said once more, "John, sign the letter. Or would you like to discuss the question with one of my boys?"

Neville swallowed hard, hoping that the nervous gulp was not audible, and then signed the letter. Bracher took it from him and threw it into the front seat with the driver. Bracher seemed about to begin to turn his attention to Pratt, but Neville distracted him by repeating, "Where are we going, Frederick?"

"We're going werewolf hunting, John," Bracher replied. "Just relax. You are here as an observer, nothing more."

"I'd rather wait back at the Center, if it's all the same to—"

"Shut up," Bracher snapped, and then turned again to Pratt. "Did my adjutant, Briggs, fill you in?"

"Yes, for the most part," Pratt replied. "Are you certain that the plant you obtained is of the correct species?"

"Absolutely. We had it verified by a botanist in Vienna, Professor Hans Edelmann. Do you know him, by the way?"

"I have heard of him, of course," Pratt replied. The elderly Austrian was one of the few assistants to Dr. Josef Mengele at

Auschwitz who had never been identified or brought to justice after World War II.

"Well, according to him, it is most definitely wolfsbane—*Aconitum lycoctonum,* he insisted upon calling it—and we have more than enough for our needs tonight. It really isn't an uncommon plant, anyway. Damn stuff grows anywhere. We've woven the sprigs into the netting and into the chains. If the old Gypsy has told us the truth about the plant's effect on the creature, then we'll be able to render it harmless."

"And if not?"

Bracher shrugged. "Then Blasko will be a dead Gypsy. If the wolfsbane doesn't weaken the creature, we'll be able to retreat while it feeds on Blasko."

Pratt nodded. "Yes, good, good. But Corporal Briggs didn't explain to me how you hope to find the . . . the hunting ground of the creature. North Dakota is a big place to search for one man, Captain."

Bracher leaned forward and called out to the driver. "Burke. Give me the map in the side pocket." The driver pulled a folded map from the cloth compartment in the door and handed it over his shoulder to Neville, who in turn handed it to Bracher. The captain unfolded it and spread it out on his and Pratt's knees. "See? Here. And here, and here."

Pratt squinted to see in the dim light of dusk, and the fat on his cheeks seemed almost to envelop his eyes. The map of Mannering, Endore, and their environs had been marked in a number of places with red checks, all in the same general area. Pratt looked up from the map. "What do these marks represent?"

"Murder sites," Bracher replied. "Some of our sympathizers on the local police forces have been keeping us informed about these things, after I let them know we were interested. The day after Kaldy escaped last month, two people were found torn apart and partially devoured here and here"—he pointed to two of the check marks. "The day after that, after the second night of the full moon, three people were found in the same area, not a half-mile from the other two." He moved his index finger to another set of check marks. "Last night was the first night of this month's full moon, and I made certain that any unusual deaths in the area be reported to me immediately. Here and here"—he pointed again—"three locals killed, mauled, eaten, last night."

Pratt nodded. "Same area."

"Precisely. Apparently Kaldy doesn't move about much. He probably stays in the woods during the day or hides in a barn somewhere, and then when the change comes on him he hunts, but he doesn't seem to travel very far. Remember when he and Blasko were arrested after that mass murder? They were less than a mile from the murder site."

"So we're headed for the area where the murders happened last night," Pratt concluded.

"Yes." Bracher nodded. "I'm hoping that our werewolf won't be able to resist the bound-and-helpless meal we are offering him."

"Good plan," Pratt said. "Risky, though."

"Of course it is. But I've been a soldier for all of my adult life, in Vietnam and in the covert struggle against the Communists. Risk is nothing new to me."

Neville coughed loudly and said, "Frederick, I really don't think I can be of much use to you on this little expedition."

"You are along to observe and evaluate, John, as I explained to you a month ago when we began our project. Now, be quiet."

"But . . ."

Bracher's eyes glared at Neville murderously. "John, if you don't shut your mouth, I'll be tempted to stake you out instead of Blasko." Neville lapsed into nervous silence.

The two vehicles drove along the road for a half-hour as the sun sank ever closer to the horizon. Then, as the sun began to disappear behind the distant treetops, they stopped and a squadron of whips climbed out from the rear of the transport truck. Bracher, Pratt, and Neville got out of the limousine, and Burke, the driver, pulled Blasko from the front seat roughly by the handcuffs.

Neville and Pratt stood to the side and watched for the next few minutes as the whips went about setting up their trap. The vehicles had come to a stop beside an indentation in the dense woods that bordered the road, an indentation which, had it been deeper in the forest, would have been described as a clearing. The whip storm-troopers set about sledgehammering a long iron stake into the hard ground, and Blasko was then bound to it by a short chain padlocked onto the connecting links of his handcuffs. Then the young men began to climb up into the trees on all sides of the clearing, those on the ground passing up to those in the branches the ends of large nets into the mesh of which had been inserted hundreds of sprigs

of wolfsbane. Nets similarly adorned were spread out on the ground on all sides of the terrified captive Gypsy, and the corners of the nets were attached to block-and-pulley mechanisms, the nexuses of which were nailed to the tops of trees.

When the preparations had been completed, Bracher motioned for Pratt and Neville to accompany him as he walked over to Blasko. "Professor, how good is your Italian?" The question posed was *pro forma,* for Bracher knew that Pratt had studied numerous European languages in the numerous colleges he had attended. Civilized languages, of course. German, French, Italian. Not Spanish or Russian or Greek.

"Adequate, Captain. Why?"

"This old Gypsy communicates with my cousin in some barbaric dialect which seems similar to Italian. I'd like you to try to translate a few questions for me."

"Well"—Pratt shrugged—"it's been a long time, but I'll give it a shot."

"Ask him if we have enough wolfsbane to control the creature."

Pratt posed the question in Italian and Blasko replied nervously in the Romansch dialect. "He says we have more than enough."

"Good. Ask him if the presence of the wolfsbane will act as a repellent, keeping the creature away from us."

The question was asked and answered. "He doesn't think so, Captain. He isn't certain, but he says that the plant doesn't seem to annoy the creature by its scent. It just causes weakness."

Bracher nodded. "Well, we'll see. Professor, I think you should wait in the limousine. John, wait there with him."

Neville rushed back into the automobile and Pratt followed after him, quickly but without haste. Bracher took his revolver from his holster and reached into the pocket of his coat. He took out a handful of the silver bullets he had commissioned and began to load the gun. No sense in taking unnecessary risks, he thought to himself. And then he too got back into the limousine and waited as the sky grew black and the full moon floated amid the dark clouds. Nothing was visible in the clearing other than the old Gypsy tied to the post. All of the whips were up in the trees, and the two motor vehicles sat dark and silent on the roadside. This has to work, Bracher thought to himself as he watched from the rear seat of the limousine. We must capture this creature. This simply has to work.

Silence reigned for the next twenty minutes. And then from the near distance came a sound, a frightening blend of growl and shriek. It sounded like a wolf, but a wolf consumed by pain and anger and hatred and hunger. Bracher closed his hand on the grip of the revolver and looked carefully out at Blasko.

No second howl followed the first. Only the chirping of the crickets and the croaking of the frogs disturbed the otherwise absolute silence. Five minutes passed, then ten, then twenty.

And then the werewolf emerged from the black darkness of the forest.

Neville shrank down into his seat as Pratt and Bracher leaned toward the window, the better to see what was about to transpire. Pratt had seen only a videotape of the creature that was even now creeping into the clearing toward Blasko, and Bracher had been so preoccupied with his own survival and the immediacy of danger that night when Kaldy had made his escape from the Hulltech Center that he gazed with wonder at the beast as if he were seeing it for the first time. "God in heaven," Bracher muttered.

"Devil from hell," Pratt corrected him in a hushed, tremulous whisper.

The werewolf was as Bracher had remembered, but the brilliance of the moonlight as it danced upon the sleek fur and illuminated the fangs and talons caused the hair on Bracher's nape to bristle. The long, almost simian arms swung from side to side as the creature loped toward Blasko.

The old Gypsy was trembling as the beast drew nigh him, and he screamed, "Janos, it is I, it is Blasko!" in the Gypsy tongue. "Stop, Janos, stop! Run away! Run away!"

The werewolf, unable to understand the words of its erstwhile keeper, rushed at Blasko; but an exclamation of astonishment from one of the whips in the treetops reached the sensitive ears of the beast, and it stopped and turned to the sound, not two feet away from where it would have entered the trap. It roared furiously and, with one bound, jumped to the trunk of the tree, its sharp claws digging into the wood as it clambered rapidly upward.

The whips opened fire from all sides, and Blasko tried to shrink down as close to the ground as possible as the bullets whistled all around him. Burning lead struck the werewolf in the back, in the chest, on the arms and legs, the face and head, and ricocheted impotently away. The creature reached up at the young man whose

voice it had heard and grabbed him by the arm, pulling him downward. The whip screamed as his grip on the branch weakened, and he fell a few feet before the creature stopped him, catching him with its jaws and holding his neck in its teeth much as a mother cat might hold a kitten. The werewolf crushed the man's spinal cord between its powerful fangs and then dropped the shuddering body to the forest floor.

The creature remembered Blasko, remembered the motionless prey in the center of the clearing, and dropped gracefully from the tree and began once again to rush at the helpless Gypsy. The werewolf crossed unknowing into the parameter of the trap, and in an instant the weights were released and the edges of the nets drew together and hoisted the creature up toward the treetops. The werewolf thrashed about madly, but the wolfsbane had its desired effect almost immediately. The muscular arms that had ripped steel from stone were now unable to tear hemp, and with every passing moment the creature became more and more quiescent. Its head lolled as if drugged, and its eyes glazed over.

One of the whips ran over to the limousine and asked, "Captain! Should we cut him down?"

"Absolutely not!" Bracher replied, masking with imperious irritation the profound delight he felt at the capture of the werewolf. "We'll leave him where he is and wait until dawn. He'll be much easier to deal with when the sun rises."

As the night wore on to morning, a careful watch was kept on the captive werewolf. It moved only occasionally, and uttered only sporadic moans, making no attempt to escape, showing no evidence of an awareness of its situation. The sun rose in due time, and Neville, who had been a fascinated if terrified witness to the events that had just transpired, rose from the floor of the limousine and looked about at the clearing. There were whips everywhere, most of them dismantling the instruments of capture, a handful keeping armed watch on the captive; but what fascinated Neville most was the sight of Kaldy, once again human in the dim light of early dawn, once again the thin weakling whom he had first seen in the cell in the Hulltech Center, huddled on the ground in Blasko's embrace, his face buried in the older man's chest, weeping as if the burden of overwhelming sorrow had broken him in two.

7

Petra Loewenstein had been working on the project for only four weeks, but she had already taken a strong dislike to Captain Frederick Bracher, a dislike that she felt was heartily reciprocated. This fact alone was sufficient to make her contemplate their impending meeting with less than enthusiasm.

Many factors accounted for her dislike of the arrogant captain. His initial reaction to her transfer from Dr. Raymore's S.S.-data-verification project had perhaps set the tone for their subsequent relationship. Bracher had been less than happy to see her when she reported to his office. There was, he had later confided to Pratt within range of Petra's hearing, a decidedly "Neapolitan" quality to the woman, and he was less than pleased with the fact that she was a woman. Raymore had sent her file to him by interoffice mail, and Bracher had studied the documents with an irritated meticulousness as if he were seeking an excuse to send her back to Raymore at once. He had found none. Hull's order had directed Raymore to transfer a chemist of his choice to Bracher's project, subject to Pratt's approval, and Petra Loewenstein was the chemist of his choice. "Loewenstein," Bracher had muttered, his eyes fixed on the file folder. "Your name sounds suspiciously Jewish."

"I know, but it isn't," Petra had responded. "It's Swiss German. I'm sure that my racial and ethnic evaluations are all right there in my file. I am of correct descent, Captain Bracher."

Bracher had leaned back in his chair to appraise her. She was shorter than average, though by no means diminutive, and darker of complexion than most of the people with whom Bracher chose to associate. She had a somehow Latin cast to her features, though Pratt had told Bracher that her father was of Swiss descent and that her mother was Irish. Bracher glanced down at her papers. Petra Loewenstein, born in Rego Park, Queens, City of New York.

Twenty-six years old. Both parents deceased. No living relatives of record. Bachelor's degree in biology, New York University. Master's degree in chemistry, Columbia University. Employed by the Dow Chemical Corporation as a staff chemist for two years. Recommended to Hulltech by a sympathetic neofascist on Dow staff and recruited for service on Raymore's staff three months ago. She had apparently been working at the Hulltech Center in Mannering since that time, and had volunteered for transfer to the Lycanthropos project, with the recommendation of Raymore and the approval of Pratt. "Why did you volunteer?" Bracher had asked.

"I beg your pardon, Captain?"

"Why did you volunteer for this project?"

"I'm interested in genetic mutation," she had replied. "When I learned what was involved in this project, I realized immediately the priceless opportunity that studying a werewolf offered to me. Such dramatic genetic mutation is—"

"How did you know that we were studying a werewolf? That is confidential information." His cold blue eyes had been boring into her brown ones as he spoke.

"No doubt it is, Captain," she had replied. "And inasmuch as Dr. Raymore is Mr. Hull's chief researcher in the field of genetics, the fact that he chose to share the secret with me should serve as further evidence of his trust in me."

Bracher had not liked her response and the verbal jousting at which she seemed to be besting him, so he changed the subject. "Perhaps before we make your assignment final you should have the opportunity to examine the subject."

"As you wish, Captain," she replied.

"Follow me," he said, and then led her from his office. He glanced at her as she reached into her purse and pulled out a surgical mask and surgical cap and began to put them on as they walked. "What the hell are those things for? You aren't going to perform surgery."

"I just want to guard against the possibility of viral or bacterial infection." The two pieces of cloth covered her entire face but for a narrow slit at the level of the eyes.

Bracher had laughed. "This is ridiculous! The man doesn't carry any infection!"

Her eyes met his as she asked, "How do you know?"

Bracher, of course, did not know. The possibility that Kaldy was infected with something contagious had never occurred to him, and he was annoyed that the woman had thought of something that he had not.

Petra reviewed that initial conversation in her mind as, file folder in hand, she approached Bracher's office. She knew that the captain was not going to be pleased with her report, even as he had not been pleased with anything about her.

She entered the anteroom and nodded a curt greeting to Briggs. Bracher's adjutant was not certain as to the status of the woman, unsure whether she was his subordinate or his equal or his superior, and was content to regard her with the same neutral courtesy with which she regarded him. He rose from his desk as she entered the room, and he announced her presence to his chief, but afforded her only the most perfunctory nod as he opened the door to the office.

Petra entered and allowed her gaze to move quickly around the room. All of the faces were familiar to her, and only one was welcome. She smiled slightly at John Neville, her daily companion in observing and examining Kaldy, and he returned her smile. He is a kind man, she thought as she seated herself in the chair beside him, harmless and inoffensive. It was obvious to her that Neville was also frightened of Captain Bracher and horrified by what was being done at Hulltech, but none of this mattered to her. He did what he was told with methodical silence and occasional bursts of an unexpected interest, which were invariably followed by self-recriminations, guilt, and prayer. He was not a threat to her, and thus he was acceptable; the added fact that he was friendly served merely to make her daily proximity to him easier to manage.

Not so his wife. Petra and Louisa might have been expected to see in each other allies or companions or at least two people drawn together by the obviously common bond of their gender, two women of approximately the same age in a racist male world. A few other women were present on Hulltech's staff of special researchers, but most of them were either middle-aged or well past it, and came from German expatriate communities in South America; at least it seemed so from names like Juanita Schmidt and Consuelo von Runstedt. Racism and sexism seemed linked together, and the world of the White Homeland Party was most definitely a man's world. Petra had thus expected to get along

well with Louisa Neville, but the latter had made no effort to hide her opinion of anyone who would willingly assist the racists in their experiments. To Louisa, Petra was the enemy, nothing more, and gender was an irrelevant factor. They had conversed briefly when first they met, and Louisa had made a tentative overture of friendship by observing that women, being more intelligent than men, were conspicuously rare in this society of dangerous eccentrics, excepting of course the leather-clad, bleached-blond, spike-heeled bimbos who seemed to hang all over the whips. Petra had agreed that women were more intelligent than men, but had then added that they were also more naive and impressionable, and thus more easily duped and exploited by the Jews. This conversation had set the tone for their subsequent relationship. Petra, too strong to need a confidante and too devoted to her research to waste time fretting over Louisa's dislike of her, reciprocated her cordial hostility.

Of Pratt she knew much, and desired to know no more. Pratt, she had decided from the outset of their acquaintance, was an ignoramus. Her dislike of him was increased by the fact that whenever she and he were in close proximity to each other, he seemed to develop wandering hands. This was distasteful enough, but what made it even worse was that Pratt seemed forever in need of a bath.

And there, sitting behind his desk, arrogant, self-important, pathetically imperious, was Captain Frederick Bracher. It was he who spoke first as the office door closed behind her. "So, Miss Loewenstein, at last! I hope that the scheduling of our meeting didn't interfere with your free time?"

She seated herself in the only empty chair in the room, between Neville and Pratt. "I'm not late by choice, Captain," she said demurely. "Your secretarial staff seems to consist of illiterate Neanderthals, and they couldn't figure out how to use the copier. Dr. Neville and I thought that you and Professor Pratt should have copies of our data, such as it is." As she spoke, she took several sheets of typed paper from the file folder and passed them to the others. "As I'm sure the professor has told you, we seem to have run up against some serious problems in our research, and we decided that you should be given a full report of our progress."

"Lack of progress, more like it," Pratt muttered.

"Yes, Professor, I agree with your correction," Bracher said,

taking his copies of the report and dropping them on the desk unread. He turned to Neville and said, "John, I can't be here every minute of every day. Hull and I are close to establishing the nationwide network we've been working on for years, so I can't stand over your shoulder to make sure you're doing what I told you to do. I instructed you to investigate the psychological background of this creature while I was in California, and I return to find nothing accomplished. Four full weeks, and absolutely nothing accomplished!"

"That's, uh, that's not entirely correct, Frederick," Neville said in what for him was almost an act of open rebellion. "In any scientific research, the elimination of possibilities is as important as the discovery of—"

"Don't waste my time with excuses," Bracher interrupted him. "You were never in the armed forces, John. One of the cardinal principles of tactics is that an indefensible position should be abandoned." Louisa Neville muttered something under her breath. "I beg your pardon, Louisa?" he asked coldly. "Did you say something?"

"Nothing of any interest to you," she replied. "I really don't want to attend this meeting of yours, Frederick. I don't even know why you ordered me to attend."

"You were invited, cousin, not ordered," he said, smiling, knowing full well that she had been given no choice in the matter. "And your presence is necessary. You have been spending quite a bit of time in conversation with the old Gypsy, and you may be doing some more conversing with him before this day is out."

Neville decided to make an attempt at bringing Bracher's attention back to the project, fearing that yet another bitter confrontation between his wife and her cousin might be dangerous. "If you'll take a few moments to read the reports, Frederick, you might—"

"Summarize them for me." Bracher's tone was that of a busy man who did not have the time to read reports.

"Well . . . very well." All the time spent writing these things, and he won't even read them, Neville thought with slight annoyance. "As you know, I've been spending my time observing Kaldy, and Petra has been attempting chemical analyses of—"

"Yes, yes, I know all that," Bracher said impatiently. "What have the results been?"

Neville took a deep breath. "My observations have yielded some rather peculiar facts. Kaldy doesn't eat, he doesn't drink, he doesn't sleep. He neither urinates nor defecates. As far as I can see, he doesn't perspire."

"That's impossible," Pratt objected. "You're talking about basic functions, vital functions of the human body."

"Right," Petra said. "That's the whole point. Apparently Kaldy isn't a human being. And it goes farther than that. I've attempted to take blood samples for analysis, but I haven't been able to force a hypodermic needle through his skin. I even had one of your guards attempt to force a needle into him, Captain, but his skin can't be pierced."

Bracher leaned forward. "Is this true, John?"

"Yes, entirely true," Neville replied.

"I also attempted to take some skin scrapings for microscopic examination," Petra went on. "There is always some dead skin on the surface of the body, flakes that can be scraped off with a scalpel, but not on Kaldy. His skin doesn't regenerate, his nails don't grow, his hair doesn't grow, which means of course—"

"Yes, yes," Pratt said excitedly. "It means that there isn't any cell decay!"

"Precisely." Petra nodded. "And that means that his physical body is in a state of . . . well, a state of permanence. No cell decay and no cell regeneration."

"Except on the nights of the full moon," Bracher observed.

"Yes," Petra said. "And I'm certain that some biochemical connection exists. When the transformation occurs, every cell in his body must mutate, change form down to the molecular level; and at all other times, every cell of his body remains in stasis, unchanging, not even subject to the normal process of decay and replacement, not in need of nourishment or rest or waste evacuation."

Bracher nodded. "And his invulnerability? That's connected too?"

"It must be," Petra replied. "We don't know how. Logically, of course, I have to point out that a wound—a bullet hole or a stab wound or the destructive results of a bomb blast—involves cellular disruption. It may be that his DNA code, for whatever reason, is so resistant to cellular disruption that the results are what we would have to regard as practical invulnerability."

"But wait," Pratt said. "We know that when he is in his animal state he is invulnerable, but in his human state . . ."

"Apparently the same condition exists," Petra said. "The mutation seems to be self-contained, unaffected by any external factors."

"Except moonlight," Bracher said thoughtfully.

"We don't know that for sure," Petra said. "We don't understand the genetic process involved, let alone the role of moonlight as a catalyst." She paused. "Inasmuch as moonlight is nothing more than reflected sunlight, logically it can't have any effect at all. If light really is the catalyst, Kaldy should be in his wolf form whenever the sun shines. Light is light. Moonlight shouldn't have any particular effect."

"But it seems to have a most profound effect," Pratt said, laughing slightly. "A most dramatic effect, if I recall correctly."

Bracher drummed his fingers on the top of his desk. "I was hoping that we'd have more than just a bunch of unanswered questions by now."

"Captain," Petra said, "we're dealing here with a phenomenon unknown to science, something which has just this moment passed from the realm of myth into the light of scientific inquiry. We can't hope to understand it completely in a few weeks."

"But time, Miss Loewenstein, is the one thing of which we have a short supply," Bracher said curtly. "As Professor Pratt knows, this project is not just devoted to acquiring abstract scientific knowledge. There are tactical ramifications to all of this." He turned to Neville. "What have been the results of the interrogations? What have we learned about Kaldy's origins?"

Neville shrugged. "Kaldy isn't cooperative, Frederick. He spends most of his time staring off into space, and questioning him is sort of like talking to a wax dummy."

Bracher's face grew red with anger. "What in God's name is wrong with you, Neville?" he shouted. "I told you to use whatever means were necessary to obtain information from the prisoner. Why haven't you used them?"

"Captain," Petra interjected, her voice soft and patient, "the conventional devices of interrogation—pain and the threat of death—aren't very useful with someone who seemingly can't be injured or killed."

"That's true, Frederick," Neville agreed quickly. He realized

this was the wrong thing to say when he saw Louisa's face growing red with anger. He began to stammer, "B-besides, Janos Kaldy is, ah, an . . . an innocent man. That is to say, I'm not . . . well, I have no intention . . ."

Bracher stood up from his desk and walked to the door of his office. He opened the door and said, "Briggs!"

His adjutant snapped to attention in the anteroom. "Yes, sir, Captain?"

"Have the two Gypsies brought in here at once." He slammed the door without waiting to hear Briggs's affirmative response, and turned back to Petra. "We'll see what we can do about getting our friend Mr. Kaldy to give us some answers."

Louisa, who had been doing her best not to listen, jumped to her feet and shouted, "Frederick, don't you dare hurt those men!"

Bracher spun around and approached her menacingly. "Or you'll do what, Louisa?" He waited for the response which he knew would not be forthcoming. "This isn't fifteen years ago, cousin, and I'm not going to tolerate your endless impertinence. Don't think for a moment that your relationship with me makes you as invulnerable as your Gypsy friend."

"Frederick—" Neville began nervously.

"Shut up, John," Bracher snapped. "And control your wife's tongue, or you'll both regret it." Neville fell obediently silent as Louisa sat back down, frightened and angry.

Pratt spoke calmly, as if the confrontation had not just occurred. "As I see it, we need to learn the following things from him: one, how he became a werewolf in the first place, and why, if there is a why; two, what understanding he has, if any, of the process of the change."

"And three," Petra added, "how he can be killed or injured."

"We aren't interested in killing him at the moment," Bracher replied, calming down slightly.

"No," Petra said, "but we are interested in analyzing his biochemical makeup, and we can't do that if we can't pierce his skin. We have to know if he can be injured or killed, because that kind of information may enable us to extract blood and tissue for analysis."

Bracher nodded. "Good thinking, Miss Loewenstein." He paused thoughtfully. "The legends speak about the power of silver. . . ."

"Yes, the silver bullet," Petra said. "I tried to scrape his skin with a blade of solid silver. It didn't work. Silver doesn't seem to have any more effect on him that anything else." Louisa remembered what Blasko had told her about trying unsuccessfully to kill Kaldy with a silver bullet, but she did not mention it. Why should I? she thought dismally. It would be fine with me if Kaldy killed each and every one of these maniacs.

"The legends aren't true, in other words," Bracher said.

"Probably not," Petra replied, "but again, we're still working in the dark. But I have to say this again: we must learn how he can be killed or injured." As she spoke, she reached into her purse and took out her surgical mask and surgical cap. Bracher and Pratt exchanged amused looks as she donned them. "And I must repeat my recommendation, gentlemen," she said. "Since we don't know what we're dealing with here, I suggest that you follow my example and protect yourselves from infection."

Bracher laughed. "I tend to doubt that werewolvery is a disease that can be passed from one person to another like a cold. A rather comical idea, don't you think?"

"No doubt," Petra replied, her dark eyes gazing coldly at Bracher through the narrow slit between the mask and the cap. "We have had one bit of success, by the way. Kaldy does produce saliva, and I have begun a chemical analysis of it."

"Results?" Bracher asked.

"Little as yet, though I have isolated an enzyme in his saliva which I can't identify. I'm continuing my tests."

"An enzyme in the saliva," Bracher mused. "Tell me, do you think there is a possibility that the old legends are correct in saying that the bite of a werewolf creates another werewolf? If there's a strange substance in his saliva . . ."

"I am a scientist, Captain," she replied. "I prefer not to speculate in the absence of concrete data."

Bracher nodded and smiled at her. "The proper approach, of course. You are doing good work, Miss Loewenstein. I must remember to mention that to Dr. Raymore when next I speak to him." This was as close as Bracher chose to come to an apology for his previously hostile attitude, and as Petra nodded to accept the compliment, he thought he saw her mouth curl in a smile beneath the surgical mask.

A moment later the door swung open and two whips dragged

Kaldy and Blasko into the room. Blasko looked around nervously and then, seeing Louisa, smiled. "*Bion journa, donna,*" he said in Romansch.

"*Buon giorno,*" she replied in Italian, smiling at him, pitying him, fearing for him.

He looked over at Petra, her face hidden beneath her mask and cap, and then smiled again at Louisa. "*La famma blanka.*" He grinned. The lady in white.

The guards positioned Kaldy and Blasko in the center of the room, and Pratt, Neville, and Petra turned their chairs around to face them as Bracher strode up to Kaldy and said, "We're going to ask you some questions, and you will answer them, Gypsy. Let me warn you before we begin that if you don't cooperate, you'll regret it." He waited for a response, and when none seemed forthcoming, he added, "And we all know that you can speak English, so don't bother trying to pretend that you don't understand me."

Kaldy turned his weary eyes slowly to Bracher and said softly, "I understand you quite well, and I assume that I'm supposed to be frightened by you. I'm just not, you see."

Bracher was overwhelmed by a sudden wave of rage at the Gypsy's words, and he struck out at Kaldy's face with a closed fist. Kaldy's head snapped back from the impact and then righted itself. No blood issued from his nose or mouth, no bruise appeared on his cheek or eye. He gazed at Bracher impassively. Bracher struggled to master his anger as he said, "You may very well be difficult to injure, pig, but I'm certain there's a way to hurt you, and you can rest assured that we'll find it. In the meanwhile, your friend here isn't blessed with your unique qualities. If I stab him, he'll bleed. If I torture him, he'll scream. So if you value your friend's life, I suggest you cooperate."

Kaldy looked over at Blasko and saw the fear in his friend's face. Blasko had not understood what Bracher said, but he was able to surmise it. Kaldy sighed. "Ask your questions. I shall answer them."

"Smart boy," Bracher said. He turned to Pratt. "Maybe you'd better do the questioning, Professor. I might not be able to control my anger at this animal's insolence."

Pratt coughed and leaned back in his chair. "How did you become a werewolf?"

Kaldy shrugged. "I don't know."

Pratt frowned. "Are you trying to be funny, Gypsy? I asked you a question and I expect to receive an answer. How did you become a werewolf?"

"I have answered your question," Kaldy said calmly, his voice a tired monotone. "I don't know how I became a werewolf. Another werewolf bit me, I suppose."

"So the bite of a werewolf does create more of his kind," Bracher observed.

"I believe so," Kaldy replied.

"And you have done this yourself?"

"I believe so," he repeated.

"How often?"

"To the best of my knowledge, only once."

"When?"

"I don't know."

Bracher folded his arms angrily. "How did you become a werewolf?" he asked, repeating Pratt's question.

"I don't know."

"Why does this change come over you?"

"I don't know."

"How can creatures like you be killed?"

"I don't know."

"Yes, and you wouldn't tell me if you did," Bracher spit. "Do you expect us to believe that you have no knowledge of your own being, of your origins, of how your condition originated?"

"Your belief or disbelief is of no interest to me," Kaldy said languidly.

"But your friend's freedom from pain is of some interest to you, isn't it?" the captain demanded. Kaldy nodded and Bracher went on, "Then I suggest you make a greater effort to be cooperative."

Kaldy sighed and asked, "Do you remember your own childhood, Captain?"

"Of course I do," he replied. "What's that got to do with—?"

"And which memories are clearer in your mind, those of your childhood or those of last year?"

Bracher bristled. "Get to the point, Gypsy."

Kaldy's eyes moved away from Bracher and gazed at a distant nothingness. "Time passes and memory fades. I am immortal,

this much I know, but the experience of so long a life buries memory beneath the weight of years. A human being can remember his childhood but dimly, and when he reaches old age his memories become jumbled and erratic; and such old age is as nothing to me." He smiled sadly, as if at some private joke. "There is a drawback to immortality, you see, something that does not occur to those who desire to live forever. Memory was not made for immortality, memory cannot absorb immortality. I remember the past two hundred years with some clarity. Beyond that, things begin to fade. Eventually they become darkness, and beyond the darkness is emptiness . . . nothing."

"Two hundred!" Neville muttered. "How old are you, Kaldy?"

"I don't know," he replied. "The first date I can fix in my mind is 1789, the year of the French Revolution. It was in that year that I was released from prison."

"Who imprisoned you?" Neville asked.

"I don't know."

"When were you imprisoned?"

"I don't know."

"How long had you been in prison?"

He shook his head. "A century, two centuries. I really don't know."

"This is ridiculous!" Bracher said. "It's impossible to forget your own origins!"

"Not necessarily, Frederick," Neville said thoughtfully. "If what he says is true, if he is indeed as old as he claims to be, then his mind may not be able to accommodate all of the memories and experiences he has undergone. Faced with centuries of life, his memory may very well not be adequate for the task of retaining it all."

"But—"

"Remember, we don't have any basis for comparison. We have no idea what may happen to the human mind and the human memory over the course of centuries. The mind may very well collapse under the weight of experience, might burn up like an overloaded electrical circuit. In order to remain sane, the mind may have to bury memories after a time, in order to make room for new ones. It's possible, Frederick, it's possible. As I say, we really have no basis for comparison."

Bracher took a moment to consider this. "Suggestions?"

"I have one," Neville said. "Hypnotic regression."

Bracher narrowed his eyes at his cousin's husband. "Explain."

"Well, Freud says that all memories are retained somewhere in the mind. We believe that we have forgotten things, but in reality the memories are all still there, buried under other, subsequent experiences. Through hypnosis we can strip away the overlying memories and work downward into previous memories."

Bracher nodded. "Can you do this with Kaldy?"

"I can try," Neville said. "I have had some small experience with hypnosis when I was studying psychoanalysis." He paused and frowned. "But for hypnosis to work, the absolute cooperation of the subject is necessary, and I doubt that Mr. Kaldy will be very cooperative."

Bracher turned to Kaldy and asked, "Have you been listening to what we've been saying?"

"Of course I have," Kaldy replied softly.

"Good. Then listen to this as well. Those of us with the foresight to see what needs to be done and the courage to do it are soon going to bring this racial whorehouse of a society crashing down. You are being given the opportunity to make a contribution to that great endeavor."

"I fear I am unworthy of such an honor," Kaldy said softly, smiling at Bracher. His voice was soft and even, but his sarcasm was far from subtle.

"But it's an honor you're stuck with," Bracher went on coldly. "Dr. Neville believes that he can discover your origins through hypnosis." He leaned his face close to Kaldy and said meaningfully, "And you *will* cooperate with him fully. Is that understood?"

"Perfectly," Kaldy replied with disinterest.

"And make no mistake about this, Gypsy: anything that lives can die, even you. If you don't cooperate with us, we won't just kill your friend. We'll discover how to kill you, and then we'll do it. Your only alternative to cooperation is death, slow death, death accompanied by great pain."

A peal of deafening laughter burst from Kaldy's lips and Bracher jumped back instinctively, startled by the sudden animation of the hitherto placid Gypsy. "Death and great pain! Oh, my goodness!

Well, then, I'll certainly do my best to be helpful!" And Kaldy laughed on and on until he seemed on the verge of hysteria.

"Return them to their cells," Bracher barked at the guards, and Kaldy and Blasko were pushed from the room. Bracher turned to the others. "His response reflects his fear, no doubt, a good sign. If he can be frightened, that must mean he can be hurt, and if he can be hurt, he can be controlled. John, begin the hypnosis as soon as he calms down."

"Tomorrow morning, I think," Neville said.

"What?"

"Tomorrow morning," he repeated. "Tonight is the full moon."

"Oh," Bracher muttered. "Oh. Well, then, tomorrow, of course . . ."

As Kaldy was pushed, pulled, dragged, and kicked back to the cell, his laughter began to subside, though he retained a look of amusement for a long while afterward. He offered no resistance to the guards as they wrapped the heavy chains around him and tied the sprigs of wolfsbane to the links, but he continued to smile and utter an occasional quiet laugh long after they had left him alone in his cell to await the moon.

Great pain and death if I do not cooperate, he thought, shaking his head with amusement. Great pain and death. "How frightening you must believe yourself to be, Captain Bracher," he whispered aloud.

Kaldy looked down at the chains and the wolfsbane. Men are so proud of their ability to kill, he thought sadly, so proud of that ability of which I am so ashamed.

And yet, as he sat silently and awaited the change, he knew that he would do whatever Bracher told him to do. But he would cooperate for the sake of his friend Blasko, to spare his friend punishment, not to protect himself from the wrath of his captors. He was neither frightened nor impressed by Captain Bracher's threats of pain and death.

For Janos Kaldy had suffered more pain than any human being who had ever lived.

And though even he himself could not delineate the parameters of his life, he had been desperately trying to die for three thousand years.

II

DARK CENTURIES

Und sie schweigen, weil die Scheidewände
weggenommen sind aus ihrem Sinn,
und die Stunde, da man sie verstände,
heben an und gehen hin.

(They are silent because the divisions
are broken down in the brain,
and the hours when they can be understood at all
come and go.)

—RILKE

8

"Can you hear my voice, Kaldy?"

"Yes."

"Do you know who I am?"

"Yes."

"Who am I?"

"You are Neville, the physician."

"Yes, good. Now, listen to me carefully, Kaldy."

"Yes."

"We are going to travel backward in time, back into your past. You will remember everything exactly as it happened. It will seem as if everything is happening once again, and you will describe it all to me exactly as it happens to you. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Good. We are traveling backward now. The years are reversing themselves. Your memory is drifting backward over time." A pause. *"The years will cease their backward motion when you reach an incident of importance to you. Do you understand?"*

"Yes."

Another pause. *"Have you reached an important incident in your memory?"*

"Yes."

"What year is it?"

"I do not know."

"Why do you not know?"

"I pay no attention to such things. Years mean nothing to me."

"Has anything important to the rest of the world happened recently?"

"Yes."

"What has happened recently?"

"The war has ended."
"Which war?"
"The war."
Another pause. "World War Two? Is that the war?"
"Yes."
"So it is 1945?"
"Yes."
"What month is it?"
"I do not know."
"What season is it? Winter, spring . . . ?"
"Spring. It is spring."
"And the war has just ended?"
"Yes."
"The Second World War ended in May of 1945. So it is spring of 1945?"
"Yes."
"Where are you, Kaldy?"
"On a hillside."
"Where is the hillside?"
"I do not know." A pause. "Hungary."
"You are on a hillside in Hungary in the spring of 1945?"
"Yes."
"Are you alone?"
"No."
"Who is with you?"
"Claudia."
"Who is Claudia?" No answer. "Is she your wife?"
"No."
"Is she your friend?"
"No . . . yes . . . no, not my friend."
"Who is Claudia, Kaldy?" No answer. "Tell me who Claudia is, Kaldy."
A long pause, and then, "She is another werewolf. . . ."

"Who are we, Janos?" Claudia asked.
"I don't know," Janos Kaldy replied.
Somewhere buried in the dim recesses of his mind there was a memory of love and a vestigial sensation of contentment that might or might not have been imaginary. Kaldy knew that he should be

enjoying a moment such as this. The sky was a clear blue and the May sun was warming the cool earth as a refreshing breeze stirred the long black hair of the beautiful woman who sat beside him on the grassy knoll. Kaldy knew that of such scenes romantic notions are born. He turned to his companion and looked at her, trying to remember the longings of passion and the need to kiss the flesh of another human being. He could not. That had all been long ago, too long ago, so long ago.

"Did you make me what I am?" Claudia asked.

"You have said that I did," Kaldy replied. "I don't remember." He lay down on his back and folded his hands behind his head. "Perhaps *you* made me as *I* am."

"I don't think so," she said, shaking her head, trying to think. "I seem to have a memory of you attacking me. Do you have a memory of me attacking you?"

"No."

"So you must have attacked me," she concluded. "You must have made me what I am."

"I don't know, Claudia. I don't remember."

She sighed. "That must be what happened."

"If you say so," he replied weakly.

They watched in inattentive silence as the faded colors of the Gypsy wagons rolled slowly past them across the distant plain. Ten of the nomadic homes of the Romany people lumbered slowly by, and the sounds of laughing children and neighing horses and squeaking, grinding wheels were wafted on the cool wind to the two people sitting on the hillside. "Do you think they are happy, Janos?" she asked.

"Who?"

"The Gypsies, down there."

"They must be happy." He rubbed his eyes. "They can die."

"Why can't we die, Janos? I want to die, so badly. Why can't we die?"

"I don't know, Claudia. I have tried, believe me. I have tried. *You* have tried."

She ran her hands through her hair and brushed a fly away from her thin nose. "I hate you, Janos. I know that I hate you. Why do I hate you?"

"Because I made you what you are."

"But you said that you didn't remember doing that."

"And you said that you did. So that must be why you hate me, because I must have bitten you and made you what you are."

"But if I hate you, why am I with you?"

He shrugged. "With whom else would you be?"

She lay down beside him and rested her head on his chest. He put one arm around her, leaving the other behind his head. "What night is it, Janos?"

"You know," he replied.

He felt her shudder. "I can't go through this again. I just can't stand it any longer."

"We have no choice."

They were silent again for a long while and then she asked, "Who are we, Janos?"

"I don't know, Claudia." His voice was patient and kindly, and betrayed no hint of irritation or annoyance. This was not the first time they had had this conversation. She wondered aloud who they were on an almost daily basis, and she had been wondering for as many centuries as Kaldy could remember. The question, posed thousands upon thousands of times, was always the same. And it remained forever unanswered.

They looked for all the world like two young lovers enjoying the first warm days of peace as they lay upon the hillside in a placid embrace. But theirs was no romantic idyll, no springtime rite of awakening passion. They were waiting for the sun to set. They were waiting for the moon.

On the plain below, the Gypsy caravan came to a slow stop on the edge of the forest, and an old man climbed awkwardly down from the front wagon and surveyed their surroundings. "Jurghis, Aladar, Blasko, Zorkis!" he called out, and four younger men came down from the drivers' seats of their wagons. They walked over to him and he said, "Let us camp here. This is a peaceful region. No need to hide in the woods."

Blasko, a strong, healthy man in his mid-twenties, shook his head. "Father, it is better to be careful than careless. The forest is like a mother to us. What harm in seeking refuge in her?"

"No harm, Blasko," the old man said. "But tomorrow we will go to the village of Hunyad to ply our trade, and from this spot we can reach the village before noon. If we go into the forest we may seek a campsite for hours, and we will waste much of the

day tomorrow." He pointed with his gnarled old finger at the narrow pathway into the woods. "See, so poor a road."

"Not too narrow for the wagons," Blasko observed.

"No, not too narrow. But it will take time. Slow journeys make distant destinations." He nodded his hoary head as if his platitude had settled the matter. "We will camp here tonight."

Blasko nodded, accepting the decision of the patriarch, and then returned to his wagon. He did not climb back up into the seat, however. Instead he walked to the rear of the wagon and, opening the small wooden door, entered it. "Visha," he said to his wife. "We will camp here for the night."

His wife, a dark young woman already growing portly from a diet too heavy in starches, raised her thick eyebrows in surprise. "Here? On the edge of the forest?"

"Yes," he replied, opening an old wooden trunk and rummaging around in it. "Father has decided."

Visha sighed. She knew better than to protest or question, though she would have felt much safer had she had the security of the forest when night fell. True, the past few years had been unusually dangerous ones for her people. The town dwellers in the countries through which the Gypsies roamed, the Magyars and the Austrians, the Italians and the Swiss, the Croats and the Poles, the Germans and the Bohemians and the Slovaks, were at first too busy slaughtering each other to pay their customary hostile attention to the Gypsies. But the Nazis in the black shirts, the ones who wore the lightning bolts on their collars, had pursued the Gypsies with a vengeance, had arrested them, imprisoned them, murdered them by the hundreds of thousands. Very few had escaped the death camps; but the small band to which Visha and Blasko belonged had managed to hide themselves and disguise themselves, and though they had faced deadly danger each and every day, they had survived. And now the war was over, Hitler was dead, Germany was in ruins, and Visha, like Blasko and most of the others in their tribe, expected the old ways to return. The forest had always been a refuge for them, and she longed for it this night. But who could argue with Father?

As Blasko took a tin of tobacco from the trunk, the shrill wail of a baby cut through the silence of the interior of the wagon, and Visha said, "Lura is awake. She sleeps so well when the wagon is moving."

"Do you need water?" Blasko asked.

"Yes, please, my love." Visha reached down into the old wooden cradle and took their infant into her arms, carefully unwrapping the swaddling rags, making ready to wash her and replace the soiled rags with fresh ones. Blasko climbed out of the rear door, took a pot from its nail on the side of the wagon, dipped it into the water barrel beside it, and then carried it back to his wife.

He watched happily as Visha, chuckling and speaking playfully to their baby in soft, soothing maternal tones, washed the infant and wrapped her. Blasko took the soiled swaddling rags without being asked, and threw them into a bucket, which, like the barrel and the pot, was hanging from the side of the wagon. He returned to his wife and child, and smiled at them both with contentment. Visha had given birth to three other children in the years of their marriage, but all three had died, all of disease. This fourth child, Lura, was their last child, this they both knew, for the delivery had almost killed Visha. She had lain in delirium for days afterward, and even now, four months later, she was not fully recovered.

Three children buried in nameless graves along the roadsides, Blasko thought. And yet, how good is life. He watched his wife expose one opulent breast, and smiled as the child suckled greedily. Little Lura, he thought. How lovely you are, how dear.

And outside the wagon, as the others were making ready the campfires and filling the stewpots with water, the sun was sinking slowly down toward the tops of the trees.

The nomads went about the nightly tasks. The food was plentiful, for hunting had been good, and the bottles of wine they had obtained in the last town they had visited were passed around freely. Soon the darkening sky was witness to merriment and music, as the sounds of mandolins and pipes drifted up from the Gypsy camp.

The sun disappeared behind the trees and soon the light of the full moon bathed the plain on the edge of the forest. The stars twinkled placidly in the cloudless sky, and the world seemed truly at peace for the first time in many years. No distant cannon boomed and nowhere was heard the whistle of flying shells or the cracking of distant rifle fire. The Gypsies rested in security and calm, sleepy and content around their flickering fires. And then the night was

rent by a shriek of agony, and then by another; and then came the rasping, guttural howls.

The Gypsies fell silent as the sounds reached their ears. The old man turned to the others and, in a hushed, trembling, terrified voice, whispered, "*Vroloki*!"

Werewolves!

As if responding to a silent command, the Gypsies broke from the campfire and rushed back to their respective wagons. They were not a people who had forgotten the myths and legends of the past as the town dwellers had done; they lived with the past as if it were the present, and their beliefs had led them to prepare for any eventuality. No Gypsy caravan traveled the plains of Central Europe without a supply of wolfsbane and silver bullets; one never knew when a werewolf would make its unholy appearance. Though they were what the Church called pagans, they nonetheless traveled with stakes and holy water and crucifixes to guard against the *nosferatu*. They kept talismans against demons and knew spells to drive away witches. Thus it was that when the cries of the werewolf broke the silence of the forest, the men of the Gypsy tribe began to load their old rifles with bullets of pure silver as the women, after herding the children into the wagons, began to remove the brittle sprigs of wolfsbane from their hiding places and began to affix the withered plants to the exteriors of the wagons.

For years afterward, Blasko would review the events of that night in his mind, wondering if he had been at fault, wondering if his bravado had caused the tragedy, wondering if he bore his own share of guilt for what transpired. He was confident, cocky, and just a bit ambitious within the context of his limited world. Father was old, and would die soon, and though his wife, whom everyone called Mother, though she was much younger than he, would continue as the unofficial chief by virtue of her age, still a new leader would be chosen from among the men. The Gypsies, like most nomadic peoples, were an elective patriarchy, not a hereditary one; and who better to choose as leader than the man who braved the fury of the werewolf and slew it in the midst of the camp?

Blasko loaded his gun as Visha rummaged through the trunk in search of the wolfsbane, and then he left the wagon and stood just outside it, awaiting the monster. The other Gypsies remained in

their wagons, guns loaded and ready, the doors and windows draped with the protective plant. He alone stood in the open, nervous and frightened, yet somehow excited and eager to confront the beast.

And then he remembered that his tribe had last gathered wolfsbane some four months before, when Visha was in her natal delirium; he remembered that she had of course been unable to go with the other women to pick the plant; he remembered that he had stayed with her during her illness, and had forgotten to get a supply of wolfsbane from another of his tribe; Visha remembered all of this as well as her search for the plant was unavailing, for she cried, "Blasko! Blasko!" at the same moment that two werewolves came bounding from the woods.

Blasko faced death and accepted it, the instinct to protect his woman and his child overcoming his abject terror. He raised the gun and aimed at one of the approaching figures, knowing that if he killed one of them, surely his fellows would be able to kill the other. He could not change the fact that he would die in the battle; but Visha would live. And little Lura would live.

Blasko prayed in the seconds between the emergence of the beasts and the firing of the gun, but he did not pray for life. He prayed that if he were bitten, the bite would kill him; for he knew full well what happened to anyone who survived the bite of a werewolf.

Blasko fired the gun.

One of the werewolves seemed to recoil from the impact of the red-hot silver that slammed into its chest, but the hesitation was momentary. Almost immediately the other Gypsies opened fire, and both of the creatures were pounded by a hail of silver bullets. But they did not fall to the ground, they did not die. The barrage of silver bullets only seemed to enrage them.

The first of the werewolves rushed at Blasko, and the young Gypsy shifted his hands from the stock of his rifle to its barrel and then swung the weapon as a club. The wooden stock splintered as it struck the werewolf on the side of the head, but it did not impede the attack. The creature lashed out at Blasko, swung a taloned claw at him, and only the Gypsy's quick reflexes, which caused him to jump backward, saved him from decapitation. He stumbled over his own feet and fell hard to the ground.

"Blasko! Blasko!" Visha screamed. The werewolf turned in

the direction of the sound, and it leapt from the ground onto the roof of the wagon. It dug its talons into the old wood and then ripped the planks from the roof. As it jumped down into the wagon, Blasko got to his feet and began to run to the rear door, but the second werewolf jumped on him and raked his back with its claws. Another barrage of bullets caused the beast to release Blasko, and it ran at another of the wagons with a furious howl tearing from its throat.

Blasko, his back bleeding and his body shuddering with pain, lost consciousness.

He awoke an hour later. As he struggled to orient his confused thoughts, as he tried to focus his eyes, he saw faces, dozens of faces, gazing down at him. He realized at once that they were the faces of the others of his tribe, and the memory of what had happened struck him at the same moment. His fellows helped him to his feet and he stumbled over to the wreckage that had been his wagon.

"No, Blasko," Father said. "No." But he had to see, he had to climb into the wreckage. Blasko screamed and collapsed into hysterical weeping when he realized that all that was left of his wife was torn cloth, wet bone, and blood, and that all that remained of his little daughter, his precious, darling Lura, was one tiny stiff cold little hand.

When morning came, the smoke from the Gypsy camp was drifting up into the cold morning air as Janos Kaldy awakened from his deep, dreamless sleep. He sat up in the grass of the hillside and looked over to Claudia, who was standing a few yards away, watching the smoke. She heard him move, and she glanced at him before returning her gaze to the distant scene. "They are burning a wagon," she said softly. "They buried something a little while ago."

"A body?" he asked.

"What was left of a body, I think. I couldn't tell from this distance, but what they buried was too small to be a body."

He sighed. "They should have camped elsewhere."

She turned and faced him. "So the fault is theirs?" Her voice was bitter and mournful, and tears welled up in her eyes.

"No, Claudia, of course not," he said softly.

She walked toward him. "They had a plant. I remember that they had a plant. It made me ill."

He raised his eyebrows in surprise. "You remember something that happened during the . . . last night?"

"I think so. I'm not certain."

"That's remarkable, Claudia! I never remember anything from the time after the change."

She shook her head. "No, no, I don't really remember anything, nothing specific. I just remember that they had a plant which made me ill." Her delicate brow furrowed. "I have a picture in my mind, Janos, and I can't remember whence it comes, but it is connected to that plant."

"What is the picture?"

"An old man. A very old man with a long white beard, dressed in a purple robe. He is holding the same plant." She looked at him. "Do you remember something like that?"

Kaldy closed his eyes and struggled to remember. After a few moments he shook his head. "No, Claudia, I . . . Wait . . . wait . . ." His brow furrowed. "Yes . . . yes . . . a plant . . . a plant that . . ."

"What is the memory, Janos?" she asked, suddenly excited and intense. "Who is the old man?"

He shook his head once more. "I don't remember. But the plant . . ." He paused, thinking, trying to dredge up the memory from deep in his mind. "There is a plant that . . ."

"That can cure us?" she asked, and then, with greater hope in her voice, "That can kill us?"

"That can control us," he answered.

Her face, so recently animated and alive, sank back into its customary funereal cast. "Of no use to us, then."

"Not true," Kaldy said, raising to his feet. "If the plant can control us, then it can keep us from killing when the change comes." He began to walk down the hillside toward the plain. He stopped and turned toward her. "It is something, at least, is it not?"

"It is nothing!" she shouted. "I don't want to be controlled! I want to die, Janos, I want to die!"

He shook his head. "We can't die, Claudia. All we can do is kill."

He did not turn to see if she was following him as he continued on down toward the billowing smoke.

* * *

At first, Louisa Neville had refused to go with her husband when he went to hypnotize Janos Kaldy, but his nervous pleas and her cousin's threatening insistence had caused her to change her mind. Neville did not want to be in the same room with Kaldy alone, and Bracher seemed to enjoy making her do whatever she wished to avoid. So she had sat at the desk in the conference room as Neville sat in a chair beside the couch where Kaldy lay. Louisa had taken pencil and paper from the desk and had begun to doodle when the session began. She was still holding the pencil, but she had stopped writing soon after Janos Kaldy began his reminiscence. She was gripping the pencil now as if it were somehow supporting her as she listened with rapt, horrified fascination. Her husband wiped the sweat from his brow as he leaned forward from his chair toward the sofa upon which Kaldy was reclining. "And so you became a companion of the Gypsy Blasko," he said.

"Yes, eventually," Kaldy replied. "He tried to kill me at first, of course. When he found that he couldn't, he . . . well, he just 'kept' me. For almost fifty years, he has kept me. In almost half a century, I only killed a few times."

"What happened to Claudia?" Louisa asked.

Kaldy sighed. "She is somewhere, I'm sure, still killing and still trying to die."

Neville sat back and let out the breath he had been holding in since the session began. "Did you make her into a . . . did you cause her to . . . ?"

"Probably," Kaldy said. "She claimed to remember that I attacked her. I don't know. Actually, she didn't know either. It's likely."

"How did you meet her?" Neville asked. "Do you remember how you met her, when you met her?"

"I do not know."

"Do you remember who she was?"

Kaldy allowed himself a small humorless laugh. "I don't remember who *I* am, Doctor."

"And you never saw her again?" Louisa asked softly.

Kaldy looked at her for a moment and then said, "I traveled with Blasko and his people all over Eastern Europe until the Russians made life intolerable to them. I had a feeling sometimes that

Claudia was following us, but I never heard of any killings anywhere we went . . . any of *our* kind of killings, that is . . . and so I think my feeling was just . . .'' He paused. ''We had been with each other for longer than either of us could remember, you see. I think I missed her.'' He seemed pensive for a moment, and then he went on, ''Blasko and his tribe took me with them when they managed to get to Italy, and from there to England, and eventually to Cuba. When Castro gave permission for people to leave a few years ago, I came with Blasko and his tribe to the United States as refugees.'' He paused. ''I'm wandering away from the point. Claudia? No, she and I went our separate ways after that morning.''

Neville nodded. Then he coughed and began, ''Did you . . . that is to say, do werewolves . . . what I mean is, you being a male and she a female . . .''

''Did we mate?'' Kaldy turned his head toward Neville and looked at him with irritation. ''A rather trivial question, don't you think, Doctor?''

Whatever response Neville would have made to Kaldy's comment was cut short as the door of the small room was flung forcefully open and Captain Frederick Bracher strode in, his face red. The door struck the wall beside it loudly as Bracher said, ''There is another werewolf!''

Neville and Louisa looked at each other in surprise, and then Neville asked, ''How did you know?''

Bracher seemed startled by Neville's calm response. ''How did I know? Did *you* know?''

''Yes, of course. Kaldy was just telling us that he and . . .'' Neville paused. ''What do you . . . do you mean that . . . ?''

Bracher tossed a few papers down at Neville's feet. ''I told you that I made certain that any unusual deaths would be reported to me, didn't I? Well, I never rescinded those orders. And I just received this report from one of our people in Piedmont, not five miles from where we are sitting. Last night, when our Gypsy was in chains, covered with wolfsbane and under constant watch, a werewolf killed three farmers near there.'' He glowered at Kaldy. ''Well?''

Kaldy shrugged. ''Claudia,'' he said simply.

''Claudia?'' Bracher demanded, turning to Neville. ''What's he talking about? Who the hell is Claudia?''

"As you said yourself," Neville replied, "another werewolf."

"A woman!" the captain exclaimed. "A female werewolf?"

"Don't let it disconcert you so, Captain Bracher." Kaldy smiled. "In some circles, the notion might be regarded as quite progressive."

"Keep your mouth shut, Gypsy," Bracher snapped. "I wasn't speaking to you."

Kaldy continued to smile with amusement as he said, "I hope that your supply of wolfsbane is adequate to the task at hand, Captain."

"What do you mean, Mr. Kaldy?" Louisa asked.

The Gypsy shrugged. "It's obvious, isn't it? The world is very large. Do you think it is a coincidence that she and I both just happen to find ourselves in North Dakota at the same time?"

Louisa's eyes widened. "You mean she's looking for you?"

"Of course she is." Kaldy smiled. "And I'm quite certain that she will find me."

Louisa gasped as she looked over at her cousin. Bracher appeared neither frightened nor disturbed by the Gypsy's words; and then she noticed that her cousin's face had gone deathly pale.

9

"Oh, Lord God, merciful Father, who knoweth the sins of each man and from whom no secrets are hidden, I, a poor miserable sinner, come before thee and beseech thee to pardon my transgressions and forgive my iniquities . . ."

John Neville knelt beside his bed in the room that had been assigned to him and Louisa on the third floor of the Hulltech Center. He was shaking, trembling, and the interlaced fingers of his folded hands were grasping each other so tightly that the tips were white and bloodless.

". . . by virtue of the blessed death and glorious resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, through whom we mortal men are made heirs of eternal life . . ."

Neville was nervous, frightened, terrified, even as Louisa was terrified, even as Petra Loewenstein was terrified. These three admitted the fear which William Pratt was reluctant to display, so he attempted to disguise his desire to leave Mannering by concocting all manner of excuses which Bracher refused to accept. Only Bracher seemed genuinely calm and unfrightened by the realization that another of Kaldy's kind was prowling the environs of Mannering. But Bracher's calm was deceptive, for even he was worried. There was another werewolf, uncaptured, uncontrolled, unidentified, and doubtless seeking to find the man whom they were keeping imprisoned in the Hulltech Center.

". . . be with us, bless us and keep us, and send your angels to guard us, that the evil one may have no power over us. I ask this in the precious name of your only begotten Son, to whom be all glory and honor now and in the world to come. Amen."

"Hypocrite!"

Neville turned his head and saw Louisa standing beside the

bedroom door, her arms folded across her chest, her face a mirror of her anger and her fear. "Hypocrite!" she repeated.

Neville rose up from his knees. "Not now, Louisa, for God's sake!"

She laughed incredulously. "For *God's* sake?"

"Stop it," he commanded.

"I'll stop when you stop, John. I'll stop reminding you that you're letting yourself get involved in something absolutely horrible, when you stop ignoring what you know is your duty as a Christian and as an American."

"I'm trying to keep us both alive!" he shouted. "What on earth do you expect me to do? Frederick hasn't given me much choice in all this, you know."

"You have a choice, and you know it!"

"All right, then, I'm choosing life over death."

"You're choosing sin over righteousness!"

" 'The powers that be are ordained of God,' " he shot back. "Does that sentence sound at all familiar, Louisa? Do you remember who Saint Paul was, Louisa?"

She spit out an incredulous laugh. "The powers that be? What am I, some ignorant fool glued to a TV screen while you rant and rave and scream Bible verses at me? You know as well as I do that 'the powers that be' are the President and the Congress and the courts, not this bunch of murdering fanatics! Don't add blasphemy to your cowardice!"

"Well . . ." he muttered defensively, "they're more powerful than I am, that's for sure."

"The Christian must not kill, John! The Christian must die rather than commit a sin like murder!"

"Don't be absurd, Louisa! I haven't killed anyone! I would never kill anyone!" He began to walk toward the door of the bedroom.

"What do you think you're doing by helping Frederick? Why do you think he wants to discover the secret to Kaldy's condition? Do you think that he plans to open a circus sideshow?"

Neville spun around and grabbed her by the shoulders, an action so forceful and uncharacteristic that she was startled into momentary silence as he shouted, "And what have your great acts of morality been, Louisa? What have you done, besides condemn

me for trying to survive? Tell me, Mrs. Translator, Mrs. Onlooker!" He released her, and as he began again to walk toward the door he added sarcastically, "For such a brave, selfless moral giant, you seem none the worse for wear."

"You want to survive, John?" she asked as she walked after him. "Is that your goal, survival? Okay, fine." She moved in front of him and blocked his path. "Then let's survive, let's both survive. Let's get away from here. Let's try to escape, let's go to the police, let's at least try to get away from Mannering." She grabbed his hands and squeezed them earnestly. "There's a werewolf out there, John, a murdering monster!"

"And now we get to the truth," he said. "You're just frightened, sweetheart, afraid of dying, afraid of being killed, and so you want to do whatever is necessary to avoid it. And that is *precisely* what I have been doing ever since your cousin—yours, not mine, someone from *your* family, not my family—got us involved in this whole crazy thing."

"Oh, John, you idiot!" she screamed. "If you had an ounce of common sense, you'd be as frightened as I am!"

"Oh, but I am as frightened as you are," he said, pushing her roughly out of the way and continuing on through the doorway and out into the hall. He walked quickly to the elevator, and as he pushed the button he said, "I'm terrified, Louisa, absolutely terrified, but I'm as frightened of these maniacs as I am of the werewolf. I am as frightened of your cousin as I am of this Claudia who seems to be prowling around. But there are differences. There are only two of these creatures, and there are hundreds, maybe thousands of crazy people who listen to Frederick. And werewolves don't build places like this damned Center of yours."

"What do you mean, *my* Center?"

"You're the one who worked here, not me."

"Why, you stupid—" Her words were cut off by the opening of the elevator doors. The whip who was operating the elevator knew that the Nevilles were going to a meeting with the captain, so he took them down to the first floor, where two other young thugs escorted them to Bracher's office. Neither John nor Louisa wished to continue their argument in the presence of these people, so they were silent until they approached the office door. Neville could simply have pushed open the door and entered the office, but he could not resist having the last word. "There's one more

thing I want you to remember," he said as he placed his hand on the doorknob. "I'm cooperating with Frederick in order to protect you—"

"Oh, come on!" she exclaimed.

"—and I'm hoping that when he's finished with this project of his, he'll let us go, but I'm not sure he will. We both know too much. The only hope either of us has of surviving this whole thing is in keeping our mouths shut and doing what he tells us to do. I intend to survive, Louisa. And if you intend to survive with me, you'd better start acting like an intelligent woman and not an emotional schoolgirl." He pushed open the door and entered the anteroom, leaving the door open for his wife. Fuming silently, she followed him past Briggs's desk and went into Bracher's office.

If Neville had hoped that entry into the presence of his wife's cousin would signal an end to argument, he was sadly mistaken, for as he and Louisa entered the office, the first thing they heard was Petra Loewenstein screaming, "I don't care about my role in the project, and I don't care about the expansion of knowledge! I want to get the hell out of here!"

"Miss Loewenstein," Bracher shouted back, "you have been assigned to this project by Dr. Raymore with the approval of Professor Pratt! Here you are, and until I say otherwise, here you will stay!"

Petra heard the door open and turned to see Neville and Louisa walk into the room. She went to Neville and grabbed his arm desperately, as if he were somehow to be her ally and salvation. "Please, Dr. Neville, please speak to him, please make him let me go! Any chemist can do what I've been doing, any chemist at all, he doesn't need me here! He says I have to stay here permanently, he says we have to continue working at night, but we can do this during the day, can't we? We don't have to stay here at night, do we?"

"Petra," Neville said gently, "I really don't have anything to say about it, really I don't. Now, we're all perfectly safe here, you know that—"

"She doesn't know anything of the sort," Louisa snapped, "and neither do I." She looked at her cousin. "Frederick, I don't have anything to do with your idiotic movement, and I don't *want* anything to do with it. I demand that you let me go! You have

no right to keep me here under guard like this, and you have no right to keep Petra here either, especially when it means shivering in our beds while we wait for a werewolf to break into our rooms and murder us!"

Bracher rose up slowly from behind his desk and glowered at her. "Now, listen to me, Louisa, and pay careful attention to what I say. The white race is at war, and when a people is at war there's no such thing as an innocent bystander. There's no such thing as neutrality. There are only allies and enemies. You and Miss Loewenstein and John and everyone else here will do exactly as they are told, without argument, without dissent, and without giving me any more of the goddamned *headaches* you've been giving me all your life!" She started to say something but he cut her off. "Louisa, one more word, and so help me God, I'll send you back upstairs and have you shot!"

A few moments of tense silence ensued. What had been apparent to Neville from the outset, and what had been axiomatic with Petra, was becoming frighteningly clear to Louisa: Frederick Bracher, despite the ties of blood that connected her with him, was perfectly capable of killing her. That a militant nationalist such as he would not be reluctant to spill innocent blood was an idea that would have surprised no one but Louisa, for part of her still thought of Bracher as the innocent boy she had known in her childhood, the clear-eyed youth with whom she had so often argued when they were at opposite ends of their teenage years. In that moment of silence following Bracher's threat, she finally accepted in her heart what she had always known in her mind, that her cousin, her Aunt Gertrude's son, was a murderer, that he had murdered innocent villagers in Vietnam, that he had murdered people both for the CIA and against the orders of the CIA, that he was murdering people right now in North Dakota, that he was quite prepared to murder her if need be.

Louisa sank slowly into one of the chairs and did not speak further. She felt her husband's eyes on her and turned to him, expecting to see smug satisfaction on his face. She saw instead sympathy and sadness, which were worse. She had cowered before the same danger and bowed before the same fear as he, and all her criticisms and recriminations seemed now but hypocritical rantings. She realized that she was just like her husband, frightened, weak, clinging to life, afraid to die. Everything John had

just said to her was true. She had thought herself brave and outspoken in defending truth and righteousness, but she had really been risking nothing, doing nothing. Hypocrite, she thought, beginning to weep softly. Hypocrite, hypocrite.

"Captain," Petra began somewhat hesitantly, "can't I at least stay in my own apartment and do the research during the day? I . . . I really don't want to be in the Center at night."

"Why not?" Bracher asked, sitting back down, inwardly pleased at his cousin's silence. "We have an ample supply of wolfsbane here. Kaldy is confined and controlled, and if the other creature tries to free him, we'll be able to capture her as easily as we captured him."

"Yes, but . . ." Petra paused, choosing her words carefully, not wishing to anger this mercurial, potentially deadly man. "If the other werewolf is in the area, it makes sense to assume that she's here, as you say, to attempt to free Kaldy, which means that she'll probably enter this building eventually. Captain, I'm not a soldier. I'm a chemist. I wouldn't be of any use to you dead, and even alive I can't be of help in capturing the other creature." She waited for Bracher to respond, and the pensive, reflective look on his face encouraged her to continue. "I'm loyal and dedicated, you know that. I'm dedicated to my research and to our common cause. But my presence in the Center at night doesn't serve any purpose, and it puts me in greater danger than it puts anyone else."

"You!" Bracher exclaimed. "Why you?"

"Because I'm the researcher here," she said earnestly. "I'm the one milking Kaldy of his saliva. I'm the one trying to find out what causes him to change and what can be done to hurt or kill him. That makes me his major enemy, *their* major enemy!"

Bracher laughed. "I don't think Kaldy would agree with you, but I see your point anyway." He paused for a moment. "All right, Miss Loewenstein. I'll make an exception for this project and let you work during the day. We've contacted your landlord and broken your lease. I'll have that reversed."

"I . . . ah . . . I already did that, Captain," she said meekly, and then added, "because I knew that you would make a logical and appropriate decision."

Bracher found her impertinence somehow oddly amusing, and he struggled to repress a laugh. She seemed to sense this, and she

blushed and smiled at him shyly. Bracher began to respond to her statement, but then looked to the door as Pratt opened it and entered the room. "Professor," Bracher greeted him. "Is everything ready?"

"Yes," Pratt said, seating himself in a chair beside Petra. "We can start whenever you want."

Neville turned from Pratt to Bracher. "What's ready? What are you talking about?"

"An experiment, John," Bracher replied. "Miss Loewenstein, fill Dr. Neville in."

"Certainly, Captain," she said, and then turned in her seat to face Neville. "You recall that I was able to isolate an enzyme in Kaldy's saliva which I couldn't identify?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, while you were hypnotizing Kaldy this morning, I was continuing my attempts to analyze the substance. I've made some headway." She reached into the file folder she was carrying and took out a sheet of paper. As she handed it to Neville she said, "As far as I can tell, this is the chemical formula of the enzyme. I've also determined what I think are the enzyme's three constituent chemicals."

Neville squinted at the writing on the page. The first formula Petra had written down in her precise handwriting was $C_{39}H_{42}N_{10}O_{12}$. Below this she had written $C_2H_4N_6O_8$, below that $C_{16}H_{16}N_2O_2$, and below that $C_{21}H_{22}N_2O_2$. "I don't recognize the first three formulae, but the fourth one looks familiar. I can't quite place it . . ."

"The chemical structure of that constituent of the enzyme seems to be identical to that of the poison strychnine," Petra said, pointing to the fourth formula.

"Ah, yes, yes, that's it." Neville nodded. "But I hardly think that strychnine . . ."

"But look here," she said, pointing to the third formula. "This combination of elements isn't present in strychnine. But it's very similar to a substance derived from the North American mushroom *Psilocybe mexicana*. Like strychnine, it is a toxin, though in small amounts it is a nonlethal hallucinogenic."

"Psilocybin." He nodded. "Yes, a hallucinogenic like LSD and mescaline. And the second formula?"

She shook her head. "I've never come across it before. Its

molecular structure is very unstable, and I've only been able to maintain it outside the enzyme by subjecting it to extremely low temperatures. Of course, that means that synthesizing it is quite difficult."

"I don't see why," Bracher said. "It seems to me that standard refrigeration should be able to—"

Petra's voice was calm and unhurried, but her face displayed impatience as she explained, "Captain, molecular activity slows down as temperature is lowered. In order to prevent the unstable bonding of this component from breaking up, we have had to create and maintain a temperature of minus one hundred degrees in the containers for brief periods. That's the only way we can study the structure. I mean, we've been doing it, but it hasn't been easy."

"Yes, I can imagine." Neville nodded pensively. "But the combination, the enzyme itself. Can it be synthesized?"

"I've tried to do just that," Petra replied, "but I'm not sure of the chemical ratios of the three constituents involved."

Bracher raised his eyebrows. "You didn't mention that in your report."

She shrugged. "I wanted to explain it to you in person, knowing how impatient you become when reading written reports." Having won at least part of her argument with Bracher, something of her customary wryness was returning. "The problem, you see, is that there are minute amounts of blood present in saliva, and the enzyme is actually present in the blood. I first had to isolate the blood element, then isolate the enzyme in the blood element, and then chemically analyze the enzyme. So many successive steps of isolation and analysis reduce the accuracy of the resultant data. I'm reasonably certain of the chemicals involved, but less than certain of their relative amounts or the nature of their bonding."

Bracher seemed annoyed. "Miss Loewenstein, I was under the impression that you had made a breakthrough."

She seemed surprised at his reaction. "Captain, this *is* a breakthrough! We've discovered the existence of an enzyme in Kaldy's blood which doesn't exist in human blood, and we've isolated its components. All we have to do now is ascertain the ratios involved, and we are well on our way to discovering the fundamental nature of the process of transformation."

"And how do you propose to determine the ratios?" Neville asked.

Petra seemed irritated at the question. "By the application of the scientific method, of course, Doctor. We'll experiment with various ratios. After all, I have a general idea of the ratios of chemical to chemical—my data can't be *that* inaccurate!—so what I have to do now is establish them accurately, by experimentation."

"And that's what I've been busy preparing," Pratt broke in. "I have had an experimental animal brought to Miss Loewenstein's laboratory. And, as I just said, everything's ready."

"Good," Bracher responded, rising from his seat. "I'd like to see this myself. I have a meeting with Mr. Hull later this week, and I'd like to be able to give him a firsthand account of what happens."

Bracher preceded Petra and Pratt out the door and Neville made to follow them. He turned to his wife and asked, "Louisa? You can come along if you wish." She shook her head silently and remained where she was, not looking at him. Neville touched her shoulder gently. "Are you okay, sweetheart?"

She sighed. "How does the Bible verse go, John? Whoever loses his life will find it, something like that?"

"Yes," he said softly.

Now she looked up through moist eyes. "We've lost our souls, John. We've surrendered."

He sat back down beside her. "We're trying to survive, Louisa, that's all. God forgives us for our weakness and our fear."

She sighed again. "Why should he? I certainly can't." He began to say something, but she cut him off. "Leave me alone, John. Just go away. I can't stand the sight of you. I can't stand myself."

Neville hesitated for a moment and then left the room. He caught up to the others in the hallway, and as he approached them he coughed to clear his throat before saying, "Frederick, wait a minute."

"What is it, John?" Bracher asked without turning to him.

"I have to warn you that experiments conducted on animals aren't always accurate in what they indicate about human beings. Differences in metabolism, body weight, genetic structure, all make it often difficult—"

"What are you prattling on about, John?" Bracher snapped.

"Well, I'm just saying that whatever results we come up with from experimenting on a rat or a dog, even a monkey, may not—"

"Put your mind at ease, John," Bracher said. "The experimental animal is a nigger. That's close enough to a human." Neville stopped walking, startled by Bracher's words, and watched as the captain, Pratt, and Petra continued on down the hall toward the elevator. After a moment's hesitation, he followed after them.

The door of Bracher's office opened and Louisa walked slowly out into the hall, her head bowed slightly and her eyes red. She waited until she heard the elevator doors close, and then she walked toward them, followed closely by the whip guards, every movement of her body bespeaking resignation and despair. She was neither stopped nor questioned by the guards as she proceeded up to the third floor of the Hulltech Center, for they had all grown accustomed to seeing her and her husband going to visit the two Gypsy prisoners.

Kaldy and Blasko were in the same cell, and would remain together until an hour or so before sunset, at which time the younger Gypsy would be removed to another cell, where he would be bound with the wolfsbane-laden chains. Tonight was the second night of the full moon, and after tomorrow morning Kaldy would once again be afforded a four-week respite from his agony.

The guard unlocked the cell door and held it open for Louisa. He locked it behind her and stood back and watched carefully as Louisa said in Italian, "I don't know what to do, Blasko, I just don't know what to do." She began to weep.

Blasko reached out and patted her hand comfortingly. He smiled at her and said in Romansch, "What can anyone do? You are not alone in your helplessness."

"That chemist thinks she may have . . ." She paused, not knowing how to explain chemical analysis to this untutored man. "The scientist thinks that she has discovered something in Kaldy's body which causes him to change form."

"Indeed," Kaldy said, also in Romansch, out of deference to his friend. His voice did not seem exactly uninterested, but he was much less intrigued than Louisa would have expected. "The news would be much more welcome if they had discovered how to kill me."

Louisa began to walk back and forth in the cell, shaking her

head and saying, "I just don't understand what's happening to the world, I just don't understand. When I was growing up, things were . . . well, things were . . . things made *sense*, Blasko, they made sense, but nothing makes any sense anymore! I mean, look at the people who are running this place! Look at what's happening here! Look at the things they are doing! Look at . . . look at *me*!" She swallowed hard and her hands began to tremble. "The world is turning into a madhouse!" she moaned, sitting down on an empty stool.

"It has always been a madhouse," Kaldy said kindly. "It is simply that you have never before lived in one of the wards."

She looked at Kaldy and asked, "Do you remember anything of the past, anything beyond what the hypnosis brought to the surface?"

"Oh, I remembered my first meeting with my good friend Blasko quite well before the hypnosis, madam. Your husband's ministrations served merely to make my memories more immediate than they might otherwise have been."

As before, Louisa was struck by the dignified intelligence of Kaldy's manner of speech. "And your memories of things prior to that?"

He shrugged. "As I've said, my memory is clear enough back to the late eighteenth century. Before that, before the French Revolution released me from prison, I remember next to nothing."

"Do you remember kindness and civility?" she asked, tears once again welling up in her eyes. "Do you remember a time when people weren't cruel, heartless, inhuman swine?"

He smiled sadly. "I remember very little kindness, madam, but I remember much cruelty. I fear such behavior is endemic to the human condition."

She looked into his dark, sad, weary eyes. "You always speak with such gentle eloquence. Are you an educated man, Mr. Kaldy?"

He shrugged once again. "I have no idea, madam, though I do read books now and then." He smiled sadly. "I have a lot of time on my hands, you see . . ."

As Louisa was calming herself with conversation and as Janos Kaldy and the Gypsy Blasko were helping to settle her nerves by their very presence, in another room on the third floor of the

Hulltech Center Lester Thompson was fast approaching the moment of his death.

Thompson had been born and raised in the Fort Green section of Brooklyn, and he had formed the determination early in his life to escape from the misery of his environment. He had lived in a two-room apartment with his husbandless mother and his five brothers and sisters, and though he had few observable alternatives to this life-style, he had known deep down that life could be better than this. He had paid careful attention in school, and had gotten good grades. When the other black children in his neighborhood began to experiment with liquor and marijuana, Thompson had refused to join them. When cocaine and heroin entered the lives of his friends, he avoided both drugs. He graduated from high school at the top of his class, and was awarded a full scholarship to the Columbia Teachers College. Four years later he had his degree, and began teaching English at Richmond Hill High School. Thompson was an effective, dynamic, inspirational teacher, and for the past five years he had been providing numerous black children with the role model so many of them desperately needed.

And it had all come to an end on that recent evening as he walked home from a parent-teacher conference, when a whip slammed a blackjack against the base of his skull and then loaded him into the van that would carry him to Mannering, South Dakota.

Thompson was trembling with fear as he looked at the cold, impassive faces that were appraising him clinically. He had screamed and yelled and threatened and pleaded when he had awakened from the drugs they had given him, but now, tightly bound, groggy from more sedatives, and terrified into silence, he sat and looked at his captors and wondered fearfully what they were going to do to him. The only thing of which he was certain, as he looked into the faces of Frederick Bracher and William Pratt and Petra Loewenstein and John Neville, was that he was facing the end of his life.

"An adequate specimen?" Bracher asked Petra.

"Yes, he'll do," she replied. "He's relatively young, mid-twenties, I'd say, and his condition is good enough, under the circumstances."

Bracher noticed the appalled, horrified look on Neville's face, and he struggled to contain his amusement at the minister's weakness as he asked, "Is something troubling you, John?"

"N-n-no, Frederick . . . no," he stammered. "But there must be . . . some other way . . ."

"Good." He smiled. "I'm glad you approve." He turned to Petra. "What exactly are you going to do here? Inject the enzyme into the nigger's bloodstream?"

"No," Petra replied, shaking her head. "What we're looking for here is a basic change in the genetic structure, not just reaction to a chemical infusion."

"So . . . ?" Bracher prompted.

"So we'll try to alter the process of cell production. You've heard of bone-marrow transplants for leukemia patients, right?"

"Of course."

"Same idea. The bone marrow, in particular the pelvic bone marrow, is the place where the body manufactures red blood cells. In leukemia cases, injecting healthy marrow into leukemic marrow should result in the production of new, more numerous, and healthier red blood cells."

"I see what you're getting at." Bracher nodded. "But if we can't pierce Kaldy's skin, we can't get at his bone marrow."

"No, but I don't think we need to," Petra said. "If we inject the enzyme into the subject's pelvic bone, it should alter the chemistry of red blood cell production so that new blood containing the enzyme will be manufactured. The marrow produces red blood cells very rapidly, and of course the blood makes a complete circuit through the body every three minutes. The cells of the body feed on the blood, so genetically altered blood should rapidly produce genetically altered body cells. So if this works—and it's still a big if, because we aren't sure about the chemical ratios in the enzyme—if this works, we should see some sort of metabolic change very quickly."

Bracher nodded again. "That's an interesting approach. I had assumed that you'd be trying gene splicing or something like that, but this seems very efficient, very simple."

"Yes, and it might not work," Petra reminded him.

"There's one way to find out," Bracher said. "Have you given the guards instructions?" After Petra nodded an affirmation, Bracher motioned to the two guards standing beside the captive man. They proceeded methodically to prepare him for the experiment. Thompson was seated against the wall in a wooden chair and his hands were already tied behind it and his feet were already

bound to its legs. The drugs he had been given combined with his own terror to obscure his ability to listen to what had just been said, and so Thompson's face showed perplexity through his fear as a metal brace was affixed to his waist and then secured by hooks to the eye screws in the wall behind him. The brace was necessary to prevent him from moving during the coming moments of unbearable pain as a syringe would be pounded into the bones of his pelvis. Thompson watched the guards with undisguised confusion as they wrapped loop after loop of heavy chain around him, chain into the links of which had been inserted dry and withered plants. When the whip guards were finished, they stepped back from the prisoner as Bracher turned to Petra. "Well, let's give it a try," he said.

The young woman went to the surgical table standing in one corner and took a long, thick, sturdy veterinarian syringe from the metal tray. She picked up a stethoscope and held it out to Neville, saying, "Doctor? If you would?"

Neville walked over to her and took the instrument from her hand, wiping his brow and swallowing hard. I'm not really doing anything wrong, he argued with himself. I'm just going to monitor the poor man's heartbeat. If he dies, they're the ones who'll have killed him, not me. I'm an innocent bystander. I'm here against my will. I'm not guilty of anything. The Lord knows I'm not guilty of anything at all. . . .

As Petra placed the needle against Thompson's hip, Neville donned the stethoscope and placed the end on Thompson's chest. Petra slipped a shield around the end of the syringe to allow her to drive it home without depressing the plunger, and then picked up a small hammer. She began to tap the brace carefully, and when the metal shaft sank into Thompson's pelvis, he shrieked.

"Shut the nigger up," Bracher said to one of the whips, who cheerfully slammed his fist into Thompson's head, sending the agonized man reeling into unconsciousness for a few moments, before the excruciating pain roused him again.

When the syringe had been hammered deeply enough into the pelvis, Petra removed the shield and depressed the plunger, injecting the synthesized enzyme into the prisoner's bone marrow.

Thirty seconds passed. The observers watched the prisoner intently, and Bracher's lips narrowed with irritation as nothing seemed to be happening. But then Thompson shrieked as a sen-

sation of incredible burning exploded in his midsection, and he tried to double over in pain. The ropes and chains and brace prevented him from moving, and so his poisoned body merely rocked and shook and shuddered. His eyes widened as the toxin that was already racking his bones invaded the rest of his body, and spasms of involuntary muscle contractions caused him to slam his jaws tightly shut, catching his tongue between his teeth. The edge of his tongue sheared off and splattered onto the floor as a river of blood began to pour from his mouth. He shuddered and wrenched against his bonds. And then his heart ruptured and he fell back motionless in the chair.

Neville stumbled backward away from the still-trembling corpse, and he repressed an urge to vomit. "His heart . . . has ceased beating."

Bracher walked forward and, leaning over, stared into the face of the dead man. Thompson's eyes were wide and staring madly, and his bloody mouth was frozen open in a final, unvoiced scream of excruciating agony.

"Damn!" Pratt muttered.

"It appears that the chemical ratio was incorrect," Petra said calmly. "I thought it might be. As I pointed out, there were so many steps involved in the analysis that I wasn't confident that we could create the correct mix on the first attempt."

"Well, you were right," Bracher agreed. "John, I think that an autopsy is called for. Miss Loewenstein, return to your laboratory, and, Professor, see to it that we obtain some more test subjects." He seemed troubled, harried. "We simply must nail this down!"

Neville lost the battle he had been waging with himself. He turned his face away from the scene before him and vomited copiously.

10

"Can you hear me, Kaldy? Do you know who I am?"

"Yes, Doctor, I know who you are."

"Where are you now, Kaldy? What year is it?"

"I do not know the year, Doctor. It is . . . it is before I was imprisoned."

"Are you in Hungary?"

"No . . . no, France. I am in France."

"Are you being imprisoned now? Are they taking you to prison now?"

"No . . . no . . . yes . . . no, not to prison. I am being taken into a courtroom."

"Is Claudia with you?"

"Yes."

"Is she being taken into court with you?"

"Yes . . . yes, she and three others."

"Three others?"

"Yes."

"Are they . . . are they like you and Claudia?"

"They are accused of werewolvery. We are all accused of werewolvery. Yes, yes, I remember it now, I can see it all now. It is the Inquisition. We are being taken before a court of the Inquisition."

"And all five of you are werewolves?"

"No. I am a werewolf, Claudia is a werewolf. The others are madmen . . . all of them . . . all of them . . . the prisoners, the judges, the mob . . . madmen." He paused, and then added softly, *"No . . . no, one sane man is there . . . just one. . . ."*

How long had it been since he had seen their faces, the face of the sad, tired young man, the face of the sad, tired young woman?

Had it really been forty-five years? Could it possibly have been forty-five years? He had been eighteen years old when he saw them dragged before the tribunal, and now he was in his sixties, old and worn out and ill and ready to die; but they! They had not changed, they had not aged, they looked exactly as he remembered them.

Michel de Notredame, savant, alchemist, scholar, astrologer, court physician to His Most Catholic Majesty Charles IX, shook his head as he stared into the faces of the two people who stood before him. This is impossible. It cannot be they.

The old astrologer remembered that week back in 1521 with the clarity that old age often imparts to memories of one's youth. He was eighteen years old, his Jewish family now Catholic for a scant nine years, when he was sent by the monsignor to observe the proceedings then being conducted at Poligny by the Dominican friar Jean Boin. It was not that the monsignor had any reason to mistrust Boin; indeed, Monsignor Pierre d'Avignon did not even know Boin. But d'Avignon mistrusted the Inquisition for a very simple and, to him, logical reason: anything invented by Italians and enthusiastically supported by Spaniards had no place in France.

And so young Michel de Notredame, young Michael of Our Lady, was dispatched on foot to make the long journey from Paris to Poligny so that his benefactor might have an eyewitness report of the investigation into these charges of lycanthropy. Michel had accepted the task willingly. He was a good student, a source of joy to his teachers, but he yearned to see people and places outside the abbey, he longed to explore the world as all young men long to explore the world; and while Poligny was not Kambaluc or Thule, it was new to him, and thus it was welcome.

He stood among the other spectators in the large open courtroom, waiting for the proceedings to begin. A thick wooden railing separated the spectators from the court proper, and it was only the special letter of authority given to him by Monsignor d'Avignon which had enabled him to move to the front of the crowd, and even that only with the assistance of the soldiers. The customary loud, boisterous, intoxicated banter of the morbid curiosity seekers who spent their time waiting to see people tortured and hanged was today subdued and nervous, for this was no simple witchcraft trial, no simple inquiry into heresy or apostasy, no

common trial for murder or theft or rape. Everyone in the room had seen the mutilated corpses lying in the mud in the town's street, had seen the jagged wounds where the inhuman teeth had ripped flesh from bone; many of the people present that day had heard the screams of their neighbors and the roars of the beasts on that night not three weeks before. The onlookers, like the officials, knew that werewolves were prowling about Poligny, and they were shaking with anger and fear.

Michel de Notredame leaned forward over the railing to get a clear view of Jean Boin, monk of the Dominican order and inquisitor general of Besançon, as he entered the room from the side door. He was flanked by two other monks carrying large, impressive tomes of learning and law. Boin's face was hard and serious, his eyes quick and small, his body thin and ascetic. He was a man who knew his duty to God, the Church, and the King, and had every intention of doing it to the best of his ability, even if Satan and all his demons were to oppose him. Boin mounted the short, narrow stairs to the seat behind the judicial bench, and all voices in the room fell silent as he intoned, "I open these proceedings in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Bear witness to the truthfulness of your servants, O Lord God, and grant to your judges the wisdom to do your will." He looked out over the crowd and continued the ritualized words that served to open an inquisitorial court. "Know ye, Christian subjects of our dread lord and sovereign King Charles IX, that I, Jean Claude Louis Marie Boin de Menier, serve as inquisitor general for Besançon by the will of our lord the King and by edict of our Holy Father Pope Leo X, Successor of Saint Peter and Vicar of Christ. May the Lord God bless these proceedings and be with this court."

The invocation completed, Boin seated himself in the large wooden chair and said to a soldier near the side door, "Present the prisoners to this tribunal."

It was at that moment that young Michel first laid eyes on the two people. Five prisoners were led into court that day, each chained heavily upon wrist and ankle, and it was only later, after the sentences had been passed, after the horror had begun, that he realized the significance of that first view of the young man and the young woman; and years were to pass before he began to suspect that it had been the hand of God and not the will of

Monsignor d'Avignon which had led him that day to the court in Poligny.

Friar Boin crooked his finger at the prisoners, who then shuffled forward toward the bench. "We will first make certain that your names have been correctly recorded," he said, and as he spoke, one of his fellow monks spread a sheet of clean white linen paper out onto the surface of the bench. As the second monk dipped his quill into a pot of ink, Boin continued, "When I indicate to you that you are to speak, you will state your name, your place of residence, and your age. Is that understood?" Three of the prisoners nodded eager, cooperative affirmations. The other two, the young man and the young woman, did not respond. No one seemed to notice this fact, other than Michel de Notredame. It was from that moment onward that he paid closer attention to those two than to the other three prisoners.

"You," Boin said, pointing to one of the prisoners.

"P-P-Pierre Bourgot," the prisoner replied. He was a tall, husky peasant with a plain, simple, honest, trusting face. "Pierre Bourgot," he repeated, apparently determined not to stammer. "I live in Poligny, in this village. I am thirty years old."

Boin glanced to his left to make certain that the scribe had copied it all down, and then nodded at the second prisoner. "You," he barked.

"I am Michael Verdung, also called Michel Udon," the second man replied. "I am a native of Strassburg, currently living in this village. My age is twenty-nine." Unlike Bourgot, Verdung seemed quite calm, though his fat, work-hardened fingers twitched as he spoke and the thin mustache on his sallow face was glistening with the drops of perspiration it had captured as they dripped from his cheeks.

"You."

"May it please you, I am Philibert Mentot of Poligny, age nineteen." The young boy's eyes radiated a naive certainty that he would survive this entire terrible experience if only he would continue to be cooperative and polite. As he spoke he glanced at the spectators, many of whom were his friends and relatives. His smile faded when no one smiled back at him.

"You."

No response.

"You," Boin repeated.

No response.

A soldier slammed the blunt end of his lance into the prisoner's stomach and shouted, "Answer the inquisitor general when he addresses you!"

Michel de Notredame furrowed his young brow when he saw that the prisoner's face seemed not to reflect any pain from the blow. Instead, he simply said in a soft, melancholy voice, "I am called Janus Chaldian. I am not French. I do not know my age."

Boin nodded as the information was copied down. It was not at all uncommon for a peasant not to know his age. "He appears to be about twenty-five years old. Note that," he said to the scribe. "And from whence do you come?"

Janus Chaldian shrugged. "I do not know who my people are."

The third monk leaned over and whispered into Boin's ear, and the inquisitor general then said, "It is sufficient for our purposes to know your last residence."

"I have been wandering," Chaldian said.

"Yes, yes, no doubt," Boin said with irritation. "Tell us where you last lived for any length of time."

"I sailed five years ago to the southern coast of France from Wallachia."

Boin's eyes went wide. "You are a Turk?"

"No," Chaldian said, "I don't think so."

"Are you a Christian?" Chaldian shrugged and did not reply. "Well, we'll see soon enough." Boin turned to the woman and said, "You."

"I am called Claudia," the woman said, her large dark eyes and white skin burning themselves into the mind of Michel de Notredame. "I do not know my age. I have been with Chaldian for as long as I can remember."

"Perhaps we will be able to assist you and your friend in improving your memories," Boin commented, making no effort to mask his annoyance. He sat back in his chair and said, "Pierre Bourgot. Step forward."

The scribe took copious notes as the investigation proceeded, but Michel did not need to commit any of his impressions to paper. Monsignor d'Avignon was not interested in receiving a verbatim report, but merely an evaluation of the validity of the proceedings. Michel formed his opinion early in the day, and nothing that was said during the following days served to alter his impressions, for

he became quickly convinced that the zeal of the inquisitors, the feeblemindedness of the accused, and the superstitious fears of the general populace had combined to produce a carnival of nonsense.

Pierre Bourgot testified that, after having lost his sheep, he was told by a specter that they would be returned to him if he would turn from God and worship the devil, which of course he promptly did. Whether or not Bourgot ever recovered his flock was not made clear, but his newfound powers made that a largely unimportant point. According to Bourgot, his fellow prisoner Verdung, also a servant of the devil, provided him with a salve which, when applied to the entire surface of his body, turned him into a wolf. No explanation was given as to how he resumed his human form, but the court reasoned that inasmuch as he obviously *was* in human form, he must have resumed it. This made perfect sense to the people in the courtroom. The idiocy of the reasoning astounded Michel de Notredame.

Bourgot further testified that he and Verdung had met young Mentot at a witches' sabbat that was conducted monthly in the woods, which was supervised by Turks, Jews, and Englishmen. Verdung and Mentot corroborated Bourgot's testimony and added some flourishes, making reference to the number of children they had eaten and the number of wild wolves with whom they had had sexual relations. The spectators accepted all of this as voluntary testimony. Very few of them paid attention to the crushed knuckles, disjointed knees, scars, and burns with which the three men seemed to have been afflicted; but Michel de Notredame recognized the results of torture when he saw them.

The testimony of Janus Chaldian and the woman Claudia was of a different quality, however, though no one other than young Michel seemed to notice the difference. Yes, they were werewolves; no, they did not worship the devil; yes, they murdered and devoured people when the change came upon them; no, they had never heard of Bourgot's salve; no, they had never been to a witches' sabbat; no, they knew none of the other prisoners; no, to the best of their knowledge the other prisoners were not werewolves.

But one statement made by the woman Claudia impressed Michel de Notredame more than anything else said during the

proceedings, a statement that threw the court into turmoil and aroused the implacable wrath of the inquisitor general. She grew restless and irritable under the questioning, until at last she said, "You ignorant idiots! I am tired of answering your foolish questions. All I want to do is to die, so if you can kill me, be about it. Otherwise, stop pestering me with your ignorant questions!"

She and her companion were then, of course, handed over to the secular arm for torture, and two days later they and the three other accused peasants were condemned to death by burning; but Michel, after freely distributing some of Monsignor d'Avignon's gold to the attendant soldiers, heard some startling reports. The man Janus and the woman Claudia had been subjected to every torture known to the expert interrogators, the rack, the thumbscrew, the hot pincers, the ankle crusher, all of them; but not one drop of blood had been spilled, not one bone had been broken, not one tear had been shed. The soldiers crossed themselves as they told young Michel that these two must be in league with the devil himself to be immune to the effects of torture. It was for this reason that Boin had decided to burn them separately from the others, privately and at night, far from the town, so that if the judgment of the Inquisition were thwarted by the powers of hell, it would not be a public defeat that might shake the faith of the people.

But Michel, armed as he was with a letter from Monsignor d'Avignon, was given permission to attend the secret burning, the holy execution that Boin conducted just after dusk in that cold December of 1521. He never forgot the events that transpired out in the forest clearing where Boin and the secular arm attempted to execute the sentence of the court. He dreamed about that night for the rest of his life, and his nightmares burned with the clarity of precise and horrible memory.

Chaldian and the woman Claudia were tied to the stakes and the dried wood was piled high around their feet just as the sun began to sink down below the horizon. Boin, his face haggard and tense, nodded the order to begin, and the soldiers tossed burning torches onto the kindling. It took no more than a minute for the wood to begin to blaze brightly, and the flames danced up around the legs and chests and faces of the two condemned prisoners. Chaldian and the woman Claudia grimaced and twisted

their bodies as the fire enveloped them, but they did not cry out, they did not plead or beg, they did not scream or weep. And they did not burn.

Boin saw that the flames were leaving them untouched, and he muttered, "*Retro me, Satanas!*" as the soldiers crossed themselves nervously and young Michel de Notredame came closer to the burning stakes so as to see more clearly the faces of the two prisoners. The young student shook his head in wonder as Janus Chaldian looked up at the full moon, which had just made its appearance in the absence of the sun, and cried, "God, if a God there be, let us burn, let us die!"

"Blasphemer!" Boin shouted. "Do you doubt God's very existence when you are on the threshold of death?"

Chaldian paid him no heed. "God, Gott, Dieu, Bogu, Allah, by whatever name you acknowledge, I beg you, if you exist, let us die, let us die, let the flames devour us!"

"Janus . . ." the woman shouted over the roaring fire, "it comes, Janus . . . it comes . . ." And then she began to scream and writhe in agony, and her companion began to scream and writhe in agony, and for a moment Boin and Michel and the soldiers nourished a hope that the fire was consuming them. That hope died as Chaldian and Claudia began to change.

Michel de Notredame squinted his eyes, certain that the dark shadows of the flames and the unearthly glow of the moon were combining to confound and confuse his vision, for what he saw happening could not possibly have been true; and a few moments later, as the prisoners' screams were reduced to bestial howls and the taloned claws began to tear at the ropes and the fanged jaws champed hungrily and the snarls and growls grew louder and more furious, the young man turned and ran wildly from the clearing. The werewolves ripped their bonds asunder and flew out from the inferno to visit death upon their tormentors.

Young Michel de Notredame had accounted himself fortunate, blessed, protected by God's holy angel, because he had survived that night. Many of the others present did not live to see the dawn, for the outraged werewolves feasted hungrily on them in the eerie, flickering light that came from the would-be execution flames. Boin escaped also, and he ordered the records of the trial expurgated so as to delete all reference to the two demons who had escaped the justice of the Church. From that day forth, the official

account of the trial of the werewolves of Poligny would contain not one word about Janus Chaldian and the woman Claudia. But Michel de Notredame remembered them. He remembered them in his waking moments, and in his dreams, and in his nightmares . . .

. . . and now it was forty-five years later, now it was the spring of 1566, and Michel de Notredame was an old man. He was wearing silk and gold upon his body, and the king's own ring upon his long, bony finger, and he was standing in the midst of a busy Paris street, staring into the faces of damnation itself.

He had done much over the past forty-five years. He had earned a reputation as a prophet and a seer, and his cryptic prophecies had come true often enough to make his name known to educated men all over Europe. When Michel de Notredame sat down in the privacy of his chambers and gazed into the candleflame, his trances afforded him visions of the future, which he structured into the strange, confusing quatrains whose evocative lines were studied and argued about and interpreted in every corner of Christendom.

But his success and his fame and his self-confidence did not afford him the strength not to tremble when he found himself face-to-face with the demons.

"You are the seer Nostradamus?" Janus Chaldian asked. The old man nodded slowly.

"We have heard of your wisdom and your powers," the woman Claudia said. "We need your help."

Nostradamus swallowed hard. "I . . . I know you," he said, his aged voice trembling. "I was . . . I was at Poligny in 1521. I was there that night . . . that night when Jean Boin consigned you to the flames. I remember you . . . I remember you both."

Chaldian and Claudia exchanged relieved looks, and the man said, "I am pleased, Lord Astrologer, for I will not now need to tell you my tale, nor attempt to convince you of its truthfulness."

"Wh-what do you want from me?" the old man asked.

"We want to die," the woman replied simply.

Nostradamus nodded nervously. "I can try," he said. "I cannot say that I will succeed, but I will try."

But he did not try to kill them, for he knew that they could not be killed. He took them to his private chambers and had them busy themselves with Kaspar Peucer's recent book about the werewolves of Livonia, *Commentarius de Praecipibus Divinationum*

Generibus, telling them that some clue to their affliction might be found in the text. Janus could not read Latin, but, much to her surprise, Claudia seemed to be able to, so she read aloud and translated it into French for her companion as Nostradamus excused himself on the pretext of an errand for the king, promising that he would return quickly.

He did indeed return quickly, with a contingent of soldiers from the palace. The old astrologer knew that these two demons could be managed while they were in their human guises, and he knew that the next full moon would be in three days' time. He had a scant seventy-two hours in which to prepare a prison for the demons, and he set about the task with all the enthusiasm and dedication of an old man who saw an opportunity to render one last service to God before his departure from this world.

Nostradamus was known, respected, and feared by everyone connected with the government, and it did not take him long to learn that in the nether reaches of the dungeons of the Bastille, that massive prison in the center of Paris, there existed a treasury stronghold unused since the days of Philip Augustus; a stronghold designed as an impregnable repository for gold and silver and, if need be, the king himself; a room surrounded by stone walls four feet thick; a room whose only window was a narrow slit in the stone no more than ten inches wide and four inches high, a slit which did not even look out at the world but rather connected the stronghold to another cell in the bowels of the prison, through which neither sunlight nor, more significantly, moonlight would ever pass; a room which did not even have a door, but merely a narrow hole in its ceiling, wide enough for a human being to be passed through and lowered the thirty feet to the floor of the stronghold, a hole which could be easily secured by more stone and iron and massive, immovable weight.

A room into which the demons would be cast.

Janus Chaldian allowed himself to be confined without protest or resistance, but the woman Claudia fought like an angry cat against the soldiers who forced her through the hole in the ceiling, allowing her to fall the thirty feet to the stone floor below. They did not know, but Nostradamus knew, that she had broken no bones, sustained no injuries, shed no blood.

The old seer waited nervously that first night of the full moon, wondering if sheltering the two demons from the moonlight would

keep them from the change, wondering if the moon were the harbinger of their curse or the creator of their curse or merely its distant companion, wondering if he was that night to die the death he had escaped forty-five years before. He sat in his chambers reading and waiting. Night fell, and no demon came to his door. Midnight came, and still he was alone in his chambers. At last, when the clock struck two, he could restrain his curiosity no longer and went to the Bastille.

He walked alone down the long, dark flights of stairs, lower and lower into the depths of the prison. The guards, their faces white and their hands trembling, would not accompany him as he went down to the stronghold. As he stood silently upon what was the ceiling of the subterranean room, he reflected that the sheets of rock and the blocks of iron he had ordered placed on the narrow entrance hole should have blocked any sounds coming from below. He reflected that the thick stone walls and the thick ceiling should have provided a soundless barrier between the world without and the perdition within.

And yet, through the thick stone and the thick iron and the high space between the floor and the ceiling of the stronghold, he was still able to hear, soft and muted but distinct, the screaming, shrieking, furious howls of the captive werewolves, the creatures whose internal demons were so powerful that even the absence of direct moonlight did not blunt their hellish rage. But they were unable to escape, for even their prodigious strength was not adequate to the task of moving tons of solid rock.

Nostradamus returned the next night, and it was the same. He had succeeded where Jean Boin had failed. The world was safe from the power of the murdering demons.

A few months later, in June 1566, Michel de Notredame, called Nostradamus, seer and prophet, alchemist and astrologer, felt his own life ebbing to an end. Two days before his death, Nostradamus did three things.

First, of course, he made out his will.

Second, he left secret private orders for the commander of the Bastille, orders prohibiting him from ever for any reason opening the stronghold or releasing its prisoners, orders which were designed to be transmitted to his successor and his successor's successor, and so on down through the ages.

And third, the aged astrologer sat down and stared into the

candleflame as he had so often over the past thirty years, seeking one final trance, one final vision of the future; and once again he saw that all human effort fades to insignificance when faced with the inexorable march of the centuries. He saw the year 1789. He saw the angry Parisian mob attack the Bastille in their revolutionary fervor. He saw them tear down the hated symbol of royal authority. He saw Janus Chaldian and the woman Claudia stumble out into the world, dazed, mute, blinded by the light after centuries of darkness, their tortured minds shattered and mad. And he saw the distant night sky of two centuries hence illuminated by the cold full moon.

Nostradamus died on June 18, 1566. His last vision, his last quatrain, was found beside his bed and later inserted at random into his *Book of Centuries*:

Mis tresor temple citadins hesperiques
Dans ici lui retire' en secret lièu,
Le temple ouvrir les liens fameliques,
Reprens ravis proie horrible au milieu.

Western citizens place a treasure in a temple, put back there in a secret place. The chains of famine open the temple. Recaptured and ravished, a horrible prey is in their midst.

As the old seer lay upon his deathbed, he wondered if he should have abandoned the habit of decades. He wondered if his final quatrain should have been a bit less cryptic.

Neville removed a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the sweat from his brow. Louisa looked at Kaldy with openmouthed wonder and shook her head slowly. "Two hundred years?" she whispered.

"Two hundred and twenty-three years, I suppose," Kaldy replied. "I knew that it had been quite a long time."

"What happened when you were released?" Neville asked.

Kaldy shrugged. "What always happens. We changed, we killed, we wandered, we wondered. We went to England for a while, and to India, to Russia, and to Hungary. Always the same." He sighed. "Always the same."

"But two hundred years!" Louisa repeated. "Locked away in the darkness for two hundred years!"

Kaldy nodded. "It wasn't pleasant. When Claudia and I were

released, we were like mad people for a long while. But slowly, some memory returned. We knew our names. We knew what we were. What we are.''

''Your name seems to have changed,'' Neville observed, ''but hers didn't. Why is that?''

''Who knows?'' Kaldy replied, his soft voice betraying a hint of irritation. ''What difference does it make? For all I know, my name is neither Janus Chaldian nor Janos Kaldy, and her name may not really be Claudia.''

''Do you remember back farther now, Mr. Kaldy?'' Louisa asked. ''Now that you remember your imprisonment . . .''

''No, madam, I'm sorry. It wasn't imprisonment that blunted my memory. It was the weight of time.''

Louisa shook her head once again. ''Such a horrible thing to do. Such a horrible thing, to lock people up and just . . . just leave them there to rot.''

Kaldy sat up on the sofa and stretched his arms with a delicate feline motion. ''Nostradamus was only doing what he thought was right. I can't condemn him for that.'' He paused. ''And don't forget that for two hundred and twenty-three years Claudia and I did not kill, so perhaps the old man was doing mankind a great service.''

Louisa allowed a long, tense breath to escape from between her lips. ''You're a forgiving man, Mr. Kaldy.''

''I am a murderer, madam. I am a werewolf. How can I bear ill will toward anyone who seeks to keep me from killing? The only resentment I feel toward Nostradamus is that he didn't make an attempt to destroy me.'' Kaldy closed his eyes and rubbed them tiredly. ''He would have failed, of course.''

''And before your imprisonment?'' Neville asked. ''No other memories? Nothing before that experience at Poligny?''

''Nothing.''

''Then we have to try again, go back farther. We must know the how and the why of this.''

Kaldy smiled at Neville with amusement. ''Why must we know?'' he asked. ''So that I can be released from this hell I live in? Or do you want your friend Captain Bracher to figure a way of using my sorrow to further his own ambitions?''

Neville flushed slightly. ''Please, Kaldy. I think you know me better than that.''

Kaldy lay back down, turning his eyes away from Neville. "I know you better than you think, Doctor. I have known people like you for centuries, and I have a very hard time appreciating your profound dedication to prolonging your life, when all I want to do is end my own."

Neville bristled. "Kaldy, that's a very easy thing for you to say. You can't die, but Louisa and I can, and we both want very badly to live. We don't have much of a choice, you know. If we don't do what Frederick tells us to do, he'll kill us, and neither of us wants to die."

Louisa lowered her eyes in shame as Kaldy replied, "I understand, Doctor, though I must remind you that, unlike me, you are going to die eventually anyway."

"Yes," Neville said, "and that's the whole point. You've lived so long that you've forgotten what it's like for the rest of us, who know that each second we live brings us one second closer to the grave. That final moment of life isn't something any of us look forward to, even those of us who have faith. I'm sure there must have been a time when you thought life was sweet and good, when living meant more to you than dying!"

"Yes, there must have been such a time." Kaldy laughed. "There must have been such . . ." He stopped laughing abruptly and his brow furrowed. "There must have . . . there must . . ." He fell into a pensive silence.

"What is wrong, Mr. Kaldy?" Louisa asked.

After a few moments he shook his head. "Nothing . . . something . . . I don't know, I don't know. For an instant there was something . . . something . . . After you said . . . after you said . . . There was something . . ."

"A memory?" Neville asked. "Did you remember something, Kaldy?"

"A memory . . ." he said quietly. "No, not a memory, not an incident, not an event . . . a feeling . . . a very old feeling . . ."

"What was the feeling?" he asked, feeling excitement growing in him. "What was the feeling?"

Kaldy's eyes glazed over. "A feeling of hot wind and sweat . . . a feeling of fear . . . of desire . . . a fear of death . . . a desire for life . . ." His lips moved with a slight tremble. When he spoke, his voice was a strained and muddled whisper, and each

syllable of the strange words which came haltingly from his mouth seemed attended by pain. "*Haitaumash . . . kakoshenkar . . .*" he whispered, grimacing and beginning to tremble. ". . . *mashkamash . . . kakosheshkar . . .*"

"What, Kaldy?" Neville asked, grabbing a pen and paper from the desktop and rapidly writing down the sounds he was hearing. "What did you say?"

"*Haitaumash . . . kakoshenkar . . .*" he repeated in a strained, breaking voice. ". . . *mashkamash . . . kakosheshkar . . .*"

"What does that mean, Kaldy?" Neville asked as he did his best to copy down the alien sounds which had come from Kaldy's lips. "What are you saying?"

"I . . . I don't know." Kaldy began to weep. He grabbed his head with his hands and shook it roughly. "I don't know, I don't know. Please, leave me in peace for a little time, please." Neville looked over at his wife. She did not return his look. And then he summoned the guard and had Kaldy returned to his cell.

When they were alone, Louisa turned to her husband and asked, "What was he saying, John?"

"Hmmm?" He was frowning intently at the sounds he had transcribed.

"I asked you what he was saying," she repeated.

"I haven't the faintest idea," he replied distractedly. "I didn't understand the language. I didn't even recognize the sound of the language, though some of the elements seem similar to Attic Greek."

"That was Greek?" she asked. "It didn't sound like Greek, at least not like the Greek you used to study in the seminary."

"I didn't say it was Greek," he snapped, continuing to look at his own writing. Only when sunk in intellectual reverie would he have spoken to her in so brusque a tone, and she understood and did not get angry. "I said that some of the elements seem similar to Greek." He frowned and began to mutter to himself. "*Haitaumash . . . haitaumash . . . heitaumai*, possibly? *Mashkamash . . . maxei*? Could be . . . could be. It's Indo-European, at least. I'd wager my life that it's Indo-European."

"John," she asked impatiently, "will you please tell me what you're mumbling about!"

He shook his head. "Nothing worth sharing with you, sweetheart. I have to send this to a philologist. All I can say is that

these words seem similar to certain Greek words, but that might be coincidental. It might mean nothing at all. It might just be gibberish." He returned his attention to the four cryptic words, and she left him to his musings. With Kaldy now back in his cell, she had no further reason to stay, and she certainly had no particular desire to keep her husband company. Whatever love she had felt for him had vanished along with her self-respect, and when she looked at him she felt only disgust and revulsion, for both her husband and herself. She found that looking at him now was like gazing into a mirror in a carnival fun house. The image was distorted, bizarre, ugly—but the reflection was unquestionably her own.

11

This, Petra Loewenstein thought glumly, has not been a very satisfying day. First the battle with Captain Bracher just to get permission to absent herself from the Center at night, especially on the nights of the full moon; then the failure of the experiment with the test subject; and now these autopsy results. She allowed herself a wry smile. Dr. Neville has been a busy fellow himself, performing an autopsy and then subjecting Kaldy to further hypnotic regression. I wonder if he's learning anything useful. I wonder how far back he has taken Kaldy in his buried memories.

Whatever he is finding out, she thought with a sigh, it can't be of less value to me than the results of the autopsy. The test subject—what was his name? Thomas? Thompson? something like that—had died of poisoning, pure and simple. Other conditions were present and may have contributed to the test subject's demise, malnutrition for example, but the basic factor here was the intrusion into the subject's system of a toxic substance.

Larry Bellamy, one of the whip guards, had brought her a cup of coffee an hour ago before going off to take his turn guarding Louisa Neville. Not wishing to risk spilling it on the report, Petra pushed the now cold drink away from her untouched. She frowned. I wonder if Neville is competent to perform an autopsy? she wondered. He has a degree in medicine, but that doesn't necessarily mean that he is able to determine the cause of death accurately. She considered this for a few moments and then rejected it. No rare tropical disease killed the test subject, she thought. No criminal conspiracy exists to attempt to mislead the researcher. We injected the subject's pelvic marrow with an untested chemical enzyme and it killed him. Any medical-school graduate could make an accurate determination.

"But then how can we discover the nature of the process?" she

wondered aloud. The skin can't be pierced, no blood or tissue samples can be taken . . . how can we determine what causes the change? How can we control it?

How can such creatures be killed?

A soft knock on the door broke into her thoughts and she turned to see Pratt amble cheerfully into the room. The smile on his face had a confident and somehow malevolent quality that disturbed her, and she did not return his smile as she asked, "Yes, Professor? What do you want?"

"Oh, I just thought that we might take a little time away from our work to get to know each other better, Petra," he replied, grinning piggishly. "We seemed to be getting along so well when we met, but we've both been so busy that we haven't had the chance to spend much time together. Alone, that is."

"Meaning no disrespect, Professor," she said slowly, meaning as much disrespect as possible, "but I find that I spend just about as much time in your company as I can stand."

His smile shifted to an angry glower and his face grew red. "I seem to remember that we had something of an understanding, Petra," he said, coming closer to her. "Dr. Raymore had many chemists he could have transferred to this project. It was only my support for your request which—"

"I was transferred by Dr. Raymore, not by you."

"I could easily have countermanded that." As he came to stand beside her, she could smell him, could smell the unbathed body and the unwashed clothes. "And I think you're going to find yourself needing a friend around here."

She lifted her head haughtily as she replied, "I doubt very much that I'll ever find myself in need of anything from you. If I were a cannibal, I suppose that I could get some use from all of your fat, but—"

He reached out and grabbed her shoulders, squeezing them tightly and shouting, "I don't appreciate being insulted, Petra, and I don't enjoy being used!"

He was pressing her back against the lab table, and she reached behind her and grabbed a scalpel. She whipped it around and held it in front of his face as she spit, "Get your filthy hands off me, you fat, stinking pig! And get out of here before I slice you up and feed you to Kaldy."

He stepped back and released her. They stared at each other

for a few moments and then he muttered darkly, "You'll regret this!" Then he stormed out of the laboratory.

She tossed the scalpel back down onto the table and, shaking her head and cursing Pratt under her breath, returned to her musings. A half-hour passed, and then the door of the laboratory swung open and Dwayne Briggs entered. "Hey, lady. Captain Bracher wants you, right away."

Petra disliked having her thoughts interrupted, and she shot Bracher's underling an irritated look. "Tell Captain Bracher that I am in the middle of—"

"The captain isn't asking you, he's telling you," Briggs snapped. "Come with me, right now." Petra contemplated telling Briggs what he could do with his attitude and his tone of voice, but then thought the better of it. These self-important punks were dangerous when crossed. Petra repressed her annoyance and followed Briggs out of the laboratory.

She entered Bracher's office to find him sitting behind his desk. Something about the expression on Bracher's face made Petra slightly apprehensive. Looking around the room, she saw Pratt sitting near the window, appraising her coldly. On the other side of the room Neville and Louisa were standing in tense silence, he with his customary look of nervousness, she with an expression of unusual sympathy and concern. Petra sat down in the chair in front of the desk and waited, dreading whatever the captain's summons portended. Bracher watched her enter, watched her take her seat, and then stared at her for a few long, tense moments.

And then he asked, "Do you think that I'm a fool, Miss Loewenstein?"

Petra's heart sank.

Bracher pounded his fist down upon a sheaf of papers on his desk. "Did you think that I'd never find out about this? Did you think I would never learn the real reason why you were so eager to work on this project?"

"I . . . I don't . . . I really don't know what . . . what you're referring to, Captain," Petra mumbled.

"Oh, well, we mustn't leave you to wallow in this incomprehension. You know what's in your personal file as well as I do." He picked the papers up, waved them at her, and then threw them down on the desk and pounded his fist on them again. "The file Raymore sent over to me was innocent enough, wasn't it? But

unfortunately for you, Professor Pratt found a cross-referenced photocopy and read it.'' The cold eyes that burned into hers radiated outrage. ''Did a bit of editing, didn't we, Miss Loewenstein! A few sheets of paper seem to have hopped out of the original file, didn't they! Imagine my surprise at learning that you grew up in an orphanage.''

''So what?'' she asked, attempting to sound unconcerned. ''Many people lose their parents at an early age. It isn't a crime.''

''Of course not,'' he said. ''But the report on your background contains a copy of the police report on the death of your parents.'' He glanced down at the pages in front of him. ''Both parents, mother and father, torn to shreds and partially devoured by a *wolf*?''

Her face grew red. ''Whatever my family's tragedies happen to be, they are certainly no business—''

''A wolf, Miss Loewenstein?'' Bracher interrupted. ''A wolf? A wolf which, according to your childhood testimony, stood on its hind legs? A wolf which the police shot, not once, but dozens of times, without apparent effect?''

''Yes,'' she shouted, ''that's right, that's right, a werewolf, okay? What difference does that make to you?''

''The difference, Miss Loewenstein,'' he said darkly, ''is that I am not accustomed to having my underlings keep things from me!''

''I'm not your underling,'' she snapped back. ''I'm not anybody's underling, and my private motives are my own affair. I'm doing exactly what you want me to do, aren't I? I'm trying to discover why this process occurs and how it can be controlled, and if I also want to learn how these creatures can be killed, so what? Do you intend to keep Kaldy alive forever? Aren't you planning to kill him as soon as you're done with him?'' She paused slightly, as if awaiting the reply, which did not need to be spoken, and then went on, ''So. And you know as well as I do that if he is shot in the head, it won't kill him, and if he is thrown alive into a furnace, he won't burn.''

''That is not the point,'' Bracher said.

''It is *precisely* the point,'' she contradicted him. ''Does it matter that your reasons for wanting to understand and then kill him are not the same as my reasons for wanting to understand and then kill him?''

"Couldn't have been . . ." Neville muttered from the side of the room.

"Damnation, John, either speak up or be quiet!" Bracher shouted.

Neville cleared his throat. "It couldn't have been Kaldy. I mean, he couldn't possibly have killed Petra's parents. He has been in Blasko's keeping ever since the end of World War Two."

"Of course it wasn't Kaldy," Petra said angrily, "but I had no way of knowing that when I volunteered for this project. I just assumed that he was the one who killed my family. How many werewolves could there be in the world, after all?"

"Well, two, at least," Neville replied. "Kaldy and Claudia."

"Yes, Claudia." Petra nodded. "And it must have been Claudia who killed my parents, unless there are more of these creatures somewhere." She turned back to Bracher and, struggling to master her emotions, said, "Look, Captain, I'm really sorry that I never mentioned my personal interest in this project. But you have to keep in mind that all I was doing was keeping my private affairs private. I've been doing my job and doing it well, and we have essentially the same goals, you and I."

"Your excuses are not acceptable," Pratt said imperiously, his small eyes glowing with vengeful anger. "Captain, I think that Miss Loewenstein should be punished severely for her deceit and disobedience." He paused as if thinking about this for the first time. "At the very least, she must be removed from this project."

Petra stared at him with undisguised hatred and then she turned to Bracher and asked, "Captain, I'd like to know if my duties here include allowing this fat pig to fondle my body whenever he wants to."

Bracher had not been expecting this question, and it took him a few moments to respond. "What are you talking about?"

"My question was clear enough, I think," she said, her voice biting and furious through its steady and moderate tone. "The only reason that Pratt brought any of this to your attention is that I refused to have sex with him."

Bracher turned his gaze slowly to Pratt. "What's this?" he asked with a chilling softness.

"Captain," the professor said quickly, nervously, his chubby hands twitching and his voice an octave higher than normal, "don't tell me you believe this slanderous nonsense!"

Bracher looked from the professor to the chemist, and the calm confidence of the latter contrasted strongly with the nervous embarrassment of the former. Bracher had no difficulty deciding who was lying and who was telling the truth. His hard face grew angry as he said to Pratt, "Aren't there enough whorehouses in this state to keep you busy, Professor? Is that the problem?"

"Captain, I assure you—" Pratt began.

"Enough!" Bracher shouted. "This is a research center and the headquarters of our movement, not a harem! And Miss Loewenstein is a scientist and a respectable white woman, not some cheap whore! You restrain yourself, Pratt, or I'll see to your restraint personally." Pratt lapsed into a disgruntled, humiliated silence as Bracher turned back to Petra and said, "This is all beside the point, of course. You haven't been open with me, Miss Loewenstein."

"Please, Captain," Petra implored, "I didn't really keep anything important from you. Apparently the professor knew about it already, and he told you about it for his own sick, selfish reasons. Please don't help him get revenge upon me when it's in your own interests to help me get revenge upon these monsters."

Despite his anger at not having been told about Petra's background, Bracher felt himself softening toward her. "I'm not interested in revenge," he objected. "I have no more an emotional antipathy to this werewolf than I have to any other Gypsy, or to a Jew or an Indian or a black, for that matter. They are all enemies of the white race, and getting rid of them is nothing more than waste disposal. To me Kaldy is nothing but another piece of rotten fruit for the garbage pile . . . except for his temporary value to us, of course."

"But your goals, our goals, go beyond this temporary struggle of white against nonwhite, Captain," Petra said. "You and I, and Dr. Raymore and Mr. Hull, and even these Cro-Magnons you have guarding this place are all dedicated to racial purification and a program of carefully controlled eugenic breeding. Part of this process is the extermination of racial inferiors, and anyone who is part man and part beast is obviously a racial inferior."

"Miss—"

"So Kaldy must die. And when we catch her"—Petra's face grew suddenly hard and hateful—"his friend Claudia must die. And for them to die, we must learn how to kill them!" She paused

and took a deep breath. "So our goals are the same, Captain. Don't begrudge me my pleasure at the prospect of playing a part in killing the creature who murdered my parents."

Bracher nodded tentatively. "Patriotism and vengeance sometimes go hand in hand, true . . ."

"Yes," she replied. "And this is one of those times."

Bracher paused and looked at her closely before saying, "Okay, Miss Loewenstein, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt on this one occasion. But I expect that in the future you won't make the assumption that there is anything, *anything,* involving the Center or any project we undertake here that is not my affair. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Captain," Petra said with a smile of relief.

"Good." He turned to Pratt. "The test subjects have arrived?" His voice was very cold, very correct.

"Yes." The professor nodded, coughing nervously, still angry at the failure of his scheme. "I sent out a few of our boys this morning, right after the first subject died, and they picked up a dozen derelicts and prostitutes over in Pierre. They just got back a little while ago." He smiled, attempting to sound friendly and familiar and at ease with Bracher, as if they were the closest of comrades, as if the recent unpleasantness had never occurred. "I got the impression from one of the boys that the streets in Pierre are just crawling with the kind of refuse we need."

"Good," Bracher responded, making a point of not reciprocating Pratt's tone, and then turned to Petra. "Miss Loewenstein, I assume that the only difficulty facing us is the determination of the proper amounts of the various chemicals, correct?"

She hesitated for an instant before replying, "Well, that's the problem we are facing at the moment."

"We have twelve test subjects. I want you to prepare serums of varying compositions for testing this evening. I don't see any need to test the possible combinations one at a time—"

"I agree, Captain," Petra broke in, "but we'll have to do it immediately, this afternoon, or wait until tomorrow morning."

"Why the delay?"

"Tonight is the second night of this month's full moon. Long before sunset I intend to be away from here and locked up safe in my own apartment."

Bracher's lips grew narrow and tight as he said, "Miss Loew-

enstein, you have the most annoying habit of turning each simple discussion into an argument."

She shook her head. "I'm not arguing, Captain. But you know as well as I do that this other werewolf seems to be somewhere in the vicinity of Mannering. Tonight will be the last time in this moon cycle that she'll be able to assume her wolf form, so it seems to me that if she intends to free Kaldy, she'll attempt to do it tonight." She paused, allowing the others present to realize the significance. "I don't intend to be in this Center when she comes here tonight, and I suggest that you move Kaldy to another location. We all know that the guards will be of no use when she attacks."

"*If* she attacks," Bracher said, "*if* she comes here tonight or any other night, *if* she is still somewhere near Mannering. We don't even know for sure that this Claudia is aware of Kaldy's capture. I'm quite sure that she killed those three farmers in that town near here last night, but it still may be a coincidence."

"Is it coincidental that my parents were killed in New York twenty-five years ago and that this creature makes her appearance in South Dakota just when we have captured her longtime companion?"

Pratt shook his head. "No, she's right, Captain. Kaldy's friend is here for a reason, and freeing him from the Center is the most likely one."

Bracher disliked having logic interfere with his plans, and he tapped his fingers on the desktop impatiently. "Well, then, we have to wait until tomorrow," he muttered.

"To run tests on all twelve subjects, yes," Petra said. "But I've been preparing different combinations of the serum all day. I have four that we can use right now, if you wish. And the Center is officially closed today, so there won't be any problem with moving bodies out if we have to."

Bracher frowned. "Yes, I was surprised to see the place so empty when I got here an hour ago. Why are we shut down?"

Petra tried not to laugh. "National holiday, Captain. Martin Luther King's birthday."

"Martin Luther King's birthday!" he shouted. "We're closed for—"

"Appearances, Captain," she reminded him. "Appearances."

He calmed himself. "I suppose," he muttered.

"Convenient for us, as it happens," Pratt added needlessly. "And four tests are better than none." Then, looking down at his watch, he cried, "Oh, my goodness! I have an appointment in fifteen minutes. Excuse me!" He stood up quickly and rushed from the office.

Pratt's sudden departure angered Bracher, though he had done nothing to impede it. "Appointment!" he spit. "How convenient." He glanced at Petra and noted with amusement that the professor's absence seemed to have put her at ease. He smiled at her, understanding her relief, and she, blushing slightly and looking down, could not help but smile in return.

Neville knew what Bracher was saying, knew that Pratt was merely absenting himself from the Hulltech Center in anticipation of that evening's full moon, but he didn't choose to protest his own presence in the light of Pratt's absence. He knew it would be futile, and Bracher seemed to be in no mood for further irritations. Instead, he said, "Frederick, wouldn't it be better to continue our tests on animal subjects? I mean, true animal subjects? Dogs, monkeys . . . ?"

"We need to approximate the human metabolism as closely as possible," Bracher said in a tone that invited no further discussion. "The animals we're using are as close to human as anything in the world of lower life forms." He moved Petra's dossier to one side and took out a pile of reports. "Now, get out of here and get to work. I have other matters to attend to." Petra rose and left the room, and Neville followed her slowly. Louisa remained seated, staring at her cousin with undisguised contempt. He returned her gaze with a similar one, and after a few moments she too rose and left the office without saying a word. Bracher watched her go and before returning to his paperwork muttered, "It'll be a bullet in the head for that one soon enough, so help me."

A moment later the door swung softly open and Bracher looked up from his papers to see Petra Loewenstein walking tentatively back into his office. "Captain," she began just a bit delicately, "I just want to thank you for your understanding and your help."

Bracher chose to be generous and replied, "My pleasure." He smiled at her. "I hope you don't think that Pratt's disgraceful behavior is typical of the men involved in the work here. We aren't all animals, you know."

"Of course I know," she replied in a quiet, sweet tone. "And

I hope you don't think me . . . well, cold or unemotional. I hope you don't think that I reject every man's advances." She blushed deeply. "I mean . . . That is to say . . ."

"Yes, yes, Miss Loewenstein," Bracher laughed, amused at her unease and thinking how lovely she looked when she was nervous and flushed. "I understand completely."

"Well, good," she responded, laughing through her embarrassment. "If you'll excuse me, then . . ." She backed out of his office.

Bracher watched her leave and then returned his attention to his work. Charming girl, he thought to himself. Such beautiful eyes.

Louisa Neville was waiting for her in the corridor. Larry Bellamy, the whip who was keeping watch on her that afternoon, was leaning against the wall smoking a cigarette and looking bored. Louisa's voice seemed gentle and friendly as she said, "Petra? Can I talk to you for a moment?"

Petra sensed the overture in the tone, but chose not to reciprocate it. "What is it? Make it quick. I'm very busy."

Louisa took a step forward and touched Petra's arm gently. "I'm sorry. About your family, I mean. And I'm sorry that I've judged you so harshly. I didn't understand."

Petra's eyebrows rose skeptically. "And now you think you do, I suppose."

"A bit better, yes," she said in the same soft, infuriating tone. "I suppose all you really want to do is find out how to capture and kill that other creature, the one who . . . well, the other one." She paused and chose her words carefully. "But, Petra, don't you see that what you're doing here is as terrible as what happened to your family? These people you're murdering are just as innocent as—"

Petra interrupted her with a curt, humorless laugh. "You Christians are such idiots."

Now Louisa's eyebrows rose. "I beg your pardon!"

"You're sorry, and you understand, and I have to see this and that," she said. "All this arrogant forgiveness and simpering sympathy."

Louisa struggled to remain calm. "I've always agreed with the old saying that to understand all is to forgive all."

"To understand all is to forgive all!" Petra exclaimed. "How

the hell do you know? Do you think you know everything? Do you think you know anything?''

''Petra, I'm just trying—''

''Let me tell you what your problem is, Louisa. You're living in an irrational world, and you can't rise above the stupid belief that somehow it all makes sense.'' She shook her head contemptuously and walked away.

Louisa pressed her lips tightly together in anger as she spun around toward the elevator, with Bellamy in tow. Hopeless, she thought. That woman is hopeless.

She folded her arms across her chest and tapped her foot impatiently on the floor. Larry Bellamy stomped his cigarette out on the clean floor and then asked, ''Hey, lady, the commissary is open, even though it's Martin Luther Coon day. You want coffee or dinner or something before you go back to your quarters?''

She snapped her head in his direction. ''What did you say?'' This was the first time that any of the whips had demonstrated anything even vaguely approaching courtesy.

''I asked you if you wanted something from the commissary.''

She gazed at him for a moment before asking, ''What's your name?''

''Larry,'' he replied.

She nodded. ''Who assigned you to me, Larry?''

''Dwayne Briggs,'' he replied. ''Why?''

''And what did he tell you?''

Bellamy shrugged. ''He said I should keep a real close eye on you.''

''Do you know who I am?'' The young man shrugged in response. ''I'm Captain Bracher's cousin.''

His eyes went wide. ''No shit?''

The elevator doors opened and she preceded him inside. Louisa felt a faint glimmer of hope as she said, ''My husband and I have been working on a very important project with my cousin. That's why we've been given bodyguards.''

''Makes sense,'' he said.

Briggs didn't explain the situation to him! she thought gleefully. He doesn't understand! She stood very close to the young man and watched carefully as the whip punched in the computer code that activated the elevator. Three, twelve, twenty-six, seven, nineteen . . .

Louisa repeated the sequence over and over in her mind as they rode up to the third floor, neither speaking to the whip nor looking at him, focusing every bit of her concentration on the numbers she had just seen. When they reached her quarters and the young man unlocked the door, she rushed in and wrote the numbers down on the margin of a newspaper. She sighed with relief and then turned to Bellamy. "I think I'd like some coffee, if it wouldn't be too much trouble."

"Yeah, sure, lady, okay," he replied.

She made an effort at sounding casual. "And don't close the door. It's stuffy in here."

He paused. "Briggs said—"

"I know, I know." She smiled. "But I'm safe up here on the third floor. I just want to air out the room for a while." Before he could think further or respond, she added quickly, "Milk and sugar in the coffee, okay?"

"Yeah," he said hesitantly. Then, apparently deciding that everything would be all right, he repeated firmly, "Yeah, okay. I'll be right back."

Louisa tried to keep from running right out into the corridor when the whip walked away. She waited until she heard the whoosh of the elevator doors and then leaned out cautiously and looked around. She heard muted voices coming from some of the rooms at the other end of the corridor, but saw no one.

She grabbed a coat, donned it, ripped the edge from the newspaper, and then removed her shoes to ensure silence as she ran back toward the elevator. She saw the floor indicator above the door move from two to one and then heard a quiet rumble as the doors opened two floors below. A code panel identical to the one in the elevator was on the wall just below the button, and after waiting a moment to give Bellamy time to walk away downstairs, she entered the number sequence carefully.

Work, she begged. Work.

It worked. The floor indicator moved from one to two, and then to three. The doors slid open and she rushed in. She entered the code once again and then put her finger on the first-floor button. No, wait, she told herself. There might be people on the first floor. Go to the basement, to the VIP parking lot. It should be almost empty. No VIP's here today except Frederick.

A shriek of agony from the other end of the corridor jolted her

as she pressed the button. Damn them, she thought. Petra, Frederick, Pratt . . . damn them all.

The elevator moved downward and she worked her fingers together nervously, terrified that the elevator might be summoned by someone on the first or second floor. She almost laughed aloud when the indicator registered B and the doors opened.

The basement was dark and silent, and even her bare feet seemed to echo against the concrete walls. The basement was heated and the floor was warm, so she kept her shoes in her hands as she walked out and looked around. Got to get to the garage door and open it somehow, she thought. Probably another, regular door somewhere. Got to get out, get to Mannering, keep in the shadows on the roadside, got to get to the police station!

Voices, footsteps, and the sound of a metal door opening and closing.

"Oh, no," she whispered. She looked around for a place to hide and saw a half-dozen limousines parked in a row against the far wall. She ran over to them and found the doors to the first one unlocked. She crept into the rear seat, pulled the door shut as quietly as possible, and huddled down in the darkness.

She heard a female voice laughing, followed by a male voice speaking softly. She peered up over the seat cautiously to see a whip and a trampy-looking girl walking in her direction. The girl was carrying a rolled-up mattress and the boy held a large jug of wine in one hand and a blanket in the other. Louisa watched as they unrolled the mattress on the floor not two yards away from her, sat down on it, and then proceeded to open the wine. The girl took a marijuana cigarette from her purse and lighted it.

Louisa slid back down onto the floor of the limousine and sighed as she smelled the aromatic smoke, listened to the giggling, and heard the sound of zippers being pulled. She closed her eyes and thought: If you're going to indulge yourselves, at least be quick about it.

They were not. They took their time. As the hours wore on toward sunset, Louisa realized that the whip and his girlfriend had nowhere to go and nothing else to do.

12

The sun was setting, and John Neville was standing alone in the ad hoc autopsy room near the now empty laboratory. He had watched earlier that same day as Petra Loewenstein injected four more captives with the different serums she had prepared, two black men, an Indian boy, and a black woman, and as each and every one of them died he told himself that he was not responsible for any of this, that he was a cog in a machine, an impotent, blameless bystander, as much a victim of the madmen who ran the Center as were these four corpses stretched out before him on the tables.

He was lying to himself, and he knew that he was lying. He sighed and shook his head. When will this all end? he asked himself. When can I just go back to Endore or go on to Namibia and just be left alone?

He looked out the window and saw the full moon shining bright and clear through the black clouds of the winter sky. Sprigs of wolfsbane had been affixed to the windows and doors of the third floor of the Center, and though the presence of the protective plant afforded Neville an intellectual, rational security, it did nothing to diminish his irrational emotional fear of the night. Dwayne Briggs and another whip, a thin, florid-faced boy named Marty Petersen, were standing in the corridor outside, ostensibly to provide additional protection in the event that Kaldy's friend Claudia made an appearance at Hulltech. Their presence did not comfort Neville. He shook his head and tried to clear his mind as he set about his ghoulish task.

He performed an autopsy on each subject, and for each one it was as before: death due to the introduction of a toxic substance into the bloodstream of the subject. All of the telltale signs of poisoning were present in the liver and the heart and the lungs.

Nothing out of the ordinary, nothing of any value to the project, nothing . . .

Nothing . . .

His mouth fell open and his eyes went wide as he gazed down on the dissected remains of Eugenia Jackson, twenty-seven years old, black, homeless. Eugenia Jackson's forearm bore upon it a butterfly tattoo; and as Neville stared at the tattoo, pale red against the sepulchral gray of the once-dark-brown skin, the butterfly was obscured and then buried beneath the thick black hair that seemed to billow up from the dead roots as the moonlight poured through the window and fell upon the corpse.

"*Briggs!*" he shrieked. "*Briggs!*"

The dead woman did not move, the heart now separated from her body did not begin to beat, the lungs which rested in a jar of formaldehyde did not strain to draw in air; but the cadaver continued to change. The face, petrified into a grotesque, agonized scream by the pain of death, elongated as the teeth grew and the eye sockets narrowed. For a moment Neville thought that he saw the dead hands move, but it was an illusion, a trick played on his eyes by the small, blunt claws that broke through the skin of the fingertips and pushed out into the moonlight.

"*Briggs!*" he screamed again.

And then the metamorphosis ceased abruptly. When Dwayne Briggs and Marty Petersen burst into the room, their weapons drawn and their faces hard and tense in reaction to Neville's frenzied cries, they found the minister staring at the dissected furry body and giggling idiotically. They lowered their weapons and Briggs asked, "What's goin' on?"

"We've done it, we've done it!" Neville cried, the excitement of the breakthrough submerging all his ethical qualms and personal fears. "All we have to figure out is how to do it without killing them first." The whips exchanged looks that mingled amusement with annoyance, and then Neville said, "Send for Captain Bracher immediately."

"The captain ain't here, Doctor," Peterson said. "He's at some conference someplace."

"Then get Professor Pratt . . ." He stopped, remembering that Pratt had also left the Center before sundown. "Petra," he said aloud to himself, and then turned back to Briggs. "Listen carefully. We've made a breakthrough here, a big one. Get us a car.

We have to pick up Miss Loewenstein at her apartment and then go find Professor Pratt, and then we have to—''

''Hold it, Rev,'' Briggs said laconically. ''For one thing, the captain doesn't like us takin' cars out whenever we want to. I mean, all we got here is limos, you know? Those things are expensive.''

''That's trivial,'' Neville insisted impatiently, ''and this is important''

''Maybe it is, and maybe it isn't,'' Briggs went on. ''For a second thing, from what I hear, ain't nothin' you can do is gonna get that chick out of her apartment when there's a full moon out.''

Neville closed his eyes and tried to calm himself. ''Briggs, you know what we're researching here, correct?''

''Yeah, I seen the tape,'' Briggs replied. ''So?''

''So look at the arm of that corpse. And look at those teeth.''

Briggs walked forward into the center of the room, with Petersen following close behind him. They leaned over the table and stared at the remains. Petersen frowned and asked, ''Dwayne, what the hell is that? Those teeth, I mean. What's going on?''

Briggs glanced up at Neville. ''One of the formulas worked?''

''Yes, yes, damm it, that's the whole point!'' Neville screamed. ''Now, go get a car and take me to Petra and Pratt!''

''Dwayne,'' Petersen repeated, ''what's going on here? What *is* this shit?''

Briggs released a deep breath. ''It's a long story, Marty. I'll explain it to you''—he looked again at Neville—''while we go get a limo.''

Briggs explained the secret research project to Petersen as they rode the elevator down to the parking garage in the basement, Petersen merely shook his head and emitted a low whistle. He was about to make a comment, but as he, Briggs, and Neville walked toward the row of limousines, they surprised a whip named Ralph Hager and a girl named Jennifer Fender on the floor. The couple were appropriately disarrayed, the air was filled with marijuana smoke, and an empty wine jug lay beside their mattress.

Briggs's first inclination was to assault Hager for his abuse of the privilege of access to the Center; but when Marty Petersen discovered Louisa Neville huddled in the rear seat of the limousine they were about to appropriate, and when Louisa succumbed to

Briggs's threats and told him what had happened, the young whip changed his mind and issued four orders instead.

First, he ordered Jennifer Fender to get her ass out of there. When she protested angrily, he punched her in the face. She looked to Hager for aid and protection, but the whip stood silent and still, not wishing to get himself any deeper into trouble. Technically, all the whips were equals, but Briggs was Captain Bracher's right-hand man, and that bestowed upon him an unofficial authority that Hager did not wish to oppose. Jennifer picked up her clothes and walked away, weeping loudly.

Second, Briggs told Petersen to get into the front seat of the limousine and serve as driver.

Third, he told Neville to get into the back with his wife and keep her quiet.

And as he joined the Nevilles in the back, with his revolver drawn and pointed at Louisa to ensure her good behavior, he told Hager to round up two more whips, find Larry Bellamy, and beat the fucking shit out of him.

At that same moment, as the limousine pulled out of the parking garage and headed for downtown Mannering, William Henry Pratt was finishing his fifth whiskey sour in a bar on Jefferson Street just off John F. Kennedy Boulevard. "Goddamn little slut," he muttered to himself. "I'll make her pay for this, I swear to God I will." He belched loudly and then rose from his seat and left the bar to walk the four short blocks to his home, the plain but pleasant ranch house that had been given to him by Creighton Hull.

Pratt waddled unsteadily down the dimly lighted street. He stumbled a few times as a result of his drunkenness, and blamed his difficulty on the darkness. The sounds of Mannering were few at this time of night, and there were almost no automobiles or people on the streets.

He heard a dog walking briskly along the pavement. Pratt listened to the clicking of the dog's nails, and he smiled, thinking how much it sounded like the clicking of a woman's high-heeled shoes. Then he realized that the clicking of the nails was growing faster and closer, and that he was hearing two paws, not four, and then he heard a snarl that could not have come from a dog.

Pratt's heart leapt up into his mouth, and he began to run. He

was a scant ten yards from the stairs to the front door of his house when the sound of his pursuer stopped abruptly, and as his shaking hand tried to force the key into the lock, he looked behind him fearfully and saw nothing. He smiled with relief. Nerves, he thought, just nerves. Some damned dog, that's all it was. He unlocked the door, opened it, entered the house, and then, after locking the door behind him, leaned against it and wiped the sweat from his brow. He was breathing hard, and he listened to the rapid heartbeat pounding in his chest. Have to lose some weight, he thought to himself. And then he was thrown forcefully forward onto the floor as the door flew open. He heard a hungry growl behind him, but had no time to turn in its direction. He was still lying facedown on the floor a split second later as the jaws snapped shut on his neck.

Pratt had not even had time enough to scream.

Less than a mile away, John and Louisa Neville and the two whips were speeding through the dark streets of Mannering in the black Mercedes limousine. Louisa turned to Neville and demanded, "John, will you *please* tell me what you're doing and where we're going?"

"First we're going to visit Professor Pratt," he said gleefully, "and he'll probably send for Petra."

"It's after dark!" she exclaimed. "We should be in our rooms, protected by that plant, not out on the streets of the city!"

He thrust his hand into his pocket and pulled out some bent and shredded branches of wolfsbane. "We *are* protected by the plant."

"But why are you doing this?"

"We've made a breakthrough," he said excitedly, and then proceeded to explain to her what had happened in the hours since they parted company in Bracher's office, becoming so engaged in his own narrative that he didn't notice his wife's openmouthed shock. He concluded by saying, "So we're on the right track. Oh, I know that we aren't anywhere near the point of completion, but we've demonstrated that somehow, in some manner we can't explain, not yet, anyway, the enzyme does cause a fundamental change in the genetic structure of the cells. Hair and nails continue to grow after life functions have ceased." He paused. "Of course, the changes in the skull are a bit surprising, inasmuch as—"

"Will you listen to yourself?" she cried. "Will you just stop for a minute and listen to what you're saying! Frederick has been

killing people, innocent people, and you and Petra and that idiot professor have been helping him do it, and now you're telling me that you're happy about the progress of the research? My *God*, John! My *God!*"

He became immediately defensive. "Of course I'm not happy with what's been happening. You know that I didn't want anything to do with this project. It's just that . . . it's just that . . ."

She waited for him to finish his statement, but he could not. "It's just what, John? It's just exciting that today's experiment was a success? It's just exciting that you seem to be able to do something horrible and unholy to the corpse of someone whom you murdered? Is that it?"

"Louisa, that isn't fair," he said softly, turning his face away from hers and staring out at the passing buildings.

"Poor John! How cruelly you're being treated."

"I'm doing what I have to do."

"Yes, and apparently you're beginning to enjoy it," she said coldly.

He rubbed his eyes wearily. "Don't start, Louisa, please. We both know the situation we're in."

"It's a situation I tried to get out of, at least! You're starting to act like this is just another intellectual exercise. I think you're actually getting a kick out of this whole thing!"

"I'm just trying to protect you!" he insisted.

She emitted a shrill, sardonic laugh. "Do you really think you can protect me from Frederick or from a monster or from anything else?"

Briggs and Petersen had been suppressing their laughter at the henpecked fool in the backseat. They looked at each other and snickered. Then Briggs tapped Petersen on the shoulder and said, "Pull over here. This is the place." As Petersen complied, Briggs continued, "You go with the Rev. I'll stay in the car and keep the lady company." He smiled at Louisa and wagged the barrel of his revolver at her in mock reproval. "Behave yourself, now."

When Neville was out on the sidewalk, he turned back to Louisa. "This shouldn't take me long. You wait here, and . . ."

She sat back in the seat and folded her arms angrily across her chest.

Neville stood on the curb, trying to think of something that might placate his wife, but she reached over and pulled the door

shut and then resumed her forbidding pose. He turned and followed Petersen up the steps to Pratt's house.

They reached the front door and Petersen grasped the handle of the brass door knocker. As he swung it down against the strike plate, the door creaked slightly open under the impact. Neville frowned as the whip pushed the door open. Foolish thing to do, Neville thought, leaving the door unlocked. Just because he's an important man in this town doesn't mean he's immune to burglary.

Two thoughts found their way into Neville's mind as he and Peterson entered the house. The first, more peripheral impression than concrete thought, was that the door was not merely unlocked, that the lock itself had been shattered.

The second was a memory from his childhood. His father had returned from a business trip with a present for John—a small black cocker-spaniel puppy. The puppy had been adorable, as all puppies are, never more so than when he would be given a meaty little bone. It had seemed so comical, Neville remembered, to see the playful little dog lose all his playfulness as his eyes stared in manic, carnivorous intensity, as he bared his little teeth and growled menacingly to warn off anyone who might dare to take his bone away.

This memory became vivid to Neville at that moment, for the look in the eyes of his puppy was the same look he saw in the eyes of the creature feasting on the torn, bloody, mutilated body of William Pratt. The growl of warning, so cute in the cocker spaniel, sent shivers through Neville's seemingly paralyzed body when it issued forth deep, low, and rumbling from the throat of a werewolf.

He and Petersen stood and watched the creature as if transfixed; and that moment of paralysis was all the time the beast needed to leap at them, grab Petersen, bear him to the ground, and rip open his throat. Blood erupted from the huge gash and splashed at Neville's feet. As if suddenly awakened from a nightmare, Neville stumbled backward and pulled the door shut behind him. He half-ran and half-fell down the steps of the house and jumped into the front seat of the car. He drove madly, ignoring Briggs's imprecations, not knowing where he was going, not even truly knowing where he was, knowing only that they had to flee, had to escape,

knowing only that Claudia had found them, that Kaldy's companion of centuries knew who they were, knew where they were, and was going to kill them, kill them all.

"Rev," Briggs shouted, "if you don't pull over, I swear I'm gonna off your old lady!"

Neville looked into the rearview mirror. "Behind you!" he screamed. "Behind you!"

Briggs turned to look out the rear window, and his face went white. "Holy shit!" he whispered.

The werewolf was chasing them.

Neville drove on wildly, past the empty Mannering Concert Hall, past dark and silent office buildings, past the municipal park. He drove for what seemed to be miles, and still the beast pursued them, loping along on its short hind legs and simian forearms, seeming to gain on them with each passing moment. Neville hit the brake suddenly to avoid crashing into one of trees that lined Lincoln Boulevard, and that brief reduction in speed was all the monster needed to jump forward and land on the trunk of the limousine.

Neville accelerated again, but he could not dislodge the creature as it slammed its massive paw against the rear window and shattered the glass. Louisa screamed, but her scream was drowned out by a shriek from Briggs as the werewolf reached in and raked its talons along the whip's face, ripping his lips and nose apart and almost tearing out his right eye.

Neville saw what was happening behind him, and he slammed on the brakes once again and sent the creature sailing over the roof of the car, to land heavily on the road in front of the limousine. Briggs pushed open the door and fell out onto the pavement as Neville gunned the accelerator and ran over the werewolf. The car bounced and rumbled as it swept over the supine monstrosity, and Neville allowed himself a moment of hope when he heard the creature scream. Then he realized that the scream had been one of outrage, not of pain, as the werewolf stood to its feet behind them and began once again to chase the speeding car, ignoring the wounded whip crawling slowly toward the sidewalk.

Neville sped onward, his hands trembling as they gripped the steering wheel, tears of abject terror cascading down his face.

Louisa, in the seat behind him, wept and prayed and watched out the broken rear window as the creature began to fade in the distance. "Faster, John," she shouted. "We're losing her."

He pressed the accelerator pedal to the floor and then lost control of the car. The limousine spun about on an ice patch and then slammed sideways into a telephone pole. They were both dazed, but fear overcame shock and they leapt from the car and began to run.

They ran aimlessly for an hour, until at last Neville's heart and lungs and legs were unable to maintain the frenzied pace. Louisa, winded but not exhausted, urged him on, but was unwilling to leave him when he stopped and leaned against a lamppost, doubling over in his exhaustion, one hand clutched to his chest. He looked up at what he had thought to be a deserted street and saw that the werewolf was not ten feet away from them, staring at them calmly. Neville looked into the cold yellow eyes of the beast, and he saw the face of death.

The werewolf walked slowly toward them, its arms swinging from its sides, shreds of Pratt's flesh still dangling from its panting jaws. It ran its red tongue over its fangs in an oddly lascivious manner, and Neville could smell the creature's foul, fecal stench as it drew closer, a stench of blood and death and decay and dirty fur. He heard the creature's low, rumbling growl mingle in the night air with his wife's screams.

And then he remembered the wolfsbane. He pulled the sprigs from his pocket and held them out at the beast, which stopped moving and seemed to blink in surprise and confusion, its animal mind unable to understand why it felt suddenly weak and ill. It took a step closer to its prey and then stepped back, shaking its large furry head. The werewolf stood and stared at them for a moment that to Neville seemed an eternity. Then it turned and ran off into the darkness. Only the reality of his terror, only the fear of losing his grip on the wolfsbane, kept Neville from fainting. He was afraid to move from the lamppost, afraid to stray from the light, and so he turned and embraced the post, his body trembling from head to foot. Louisa clung to him so tightly that his arm began to grow numb. Their eyes searched the darkness incessantly as their lips moved in frenzied, silent prayer.

Time passed, an hour, two hours, three hours, and still they did not move. The streets of Mannering were largely deserted, and only once did a vehicle go by, a pickup truck driven by a young farmer. Louisa called out and waved to him, but he either did not see her or ignored her cries. The truck drove on, leaving the two terrified people huddled together against the lamppost.

Dawn was but an hour away when rescue seemed at last to arrive, as a black limousine pulled up to the curb. Louisa allowed herself a smile, which faded as the rear door swung open and a furious Frederick Bracher stepped out onto the street. "What the hell . . . ?" he shouted. "How did you two get out?"

"F-F-Frederick," Neville stammered, "listen . . ."

Bracher walked forward, stared at them for a moment, and then punched Neville hard in the stomach. As the air rushed out of him, the minister's legs buckled and he fell to his knees. Bracher then turned to his cousin and swung his open hand around viciously, slapping her across the face with such force that she fell away from the lamppost and dropped onto the cold sidewalk.

Bracher barked an order to his driver, who proceeded to shove the Nevilles into the rear of the limousine. Bracher got back in and shut the door, drawing his revolver and saying, "I should kill the two of you right now."

"Listen, Frederick, please," Neville panted, his left hand pressed against his sore midsection, his right hand still clutching the wolfsbane. "The formula works . . . and Claudia . . . we saw Claudia."

As the limousine began the drive back toward the Hulltech Center, two glowing yellow eyes watched it from the shadows of a nearby alley. The creature was angry and frustrated that it had been somehow prevented from killing its prey. And when a few minutes later a young man and a young woman, both intoxicated, laughed and groped and stumbled along on the other side of the street, the creature's anger and frustration vanished and were replaced by new feelings.

. . . *still hungry* . . .

The werewolf began to creep toward them.

. . . *more meat* . . .

An eruption of screams and growls and the sound of tearing cloth and ripping flesh.

. . . *good* . . .

A soft hiss and transient wisps of steam as hot red liquid splattered on the cold pavement.

. . . *good* . . .

Silence on the dark street.

. . . *good* . . .

13

The next cycle of the full moon was four weeks away, and everyone involved in the project attended to his or her respective tasks. In a sense, Pratt's death simplified matters somewhat. Petra Loewenstein had found him an insufferable, overbearing, libidinous boor, and she was able to work with many fewer distractions in his permanent absence. Of course, after Neville told her the next morning of Pratt's death at the hands of the werewolf, she had fled from Mannering to Bismarck and had taken the next available flight to New York City; and when a pair of Bracher's whips tracked her down the next day at the home of an old college friend, they needed to handcuff her and physically carry her back to Mannering. It had taken Bracher a full hour of screams and threats to make her see the error of her ways. Petra had returned to her research with her customary efficiency and dedication, but she had grown increasingly nervous as each passing dusk brought them all one night closer to the next full moon. As she never tired of reminding Bracher and anyone else within earshot, she was the researcher who had explored the workings of the body of their captive werewolf; and thus she had the most to fear from his ancient companion.

Pratt's death was also not entirely unwelcome to Captain Bracher. The professor's status as a racial expert with the full confidence of Creighton Hull had caused a strain in Pratt's relationship with Bracher, even though the veteran of the Marines and the CIA was clearly in charge. Now, with Pratt's rather limited remains safely buried, there was no question whatsoever of anyone less than Hull himself interfering with Bracher's activities. Dr. Carlaisle Raymore was appointed director of the Center in Pratt's place, and he served as the rubber stamp Bracher wanted him to be.

Dwayne Briggs recovered quickly from his brush with death, though he was reminded of it each time he looked into a mirror. His face had been badly disfigured by the talons of the monster, and the stiches in his lips, nose, and cheek portended scars that would never fade.

Neville seemingly recovered from his encounter with the werewolf Claudia, but the experience had left him with a personal determination to learn how Kaldy and his companion had become such creatures, to understand the nature of their change, to learn to control them, to learn to destroy them. He worked now for himself as much as for Bracher, as much out of fascination as fear.

Louisa spent her days talking with old Blasko, who looked forward to her daily visits. Deep affection was growing between the old Gypsy and the young American, and this affection itself deepened Louisa's sorrow and her shame. Only the fact that she and Blasko conversed in Italian and Romansch afforded their visits any semblance of privacy, for ever since her escape attempt Louisa had been kept under constant armed guard, and the vigilance of her guards was ensured by their knowledge of what had happened to Larry Bellamy. The young man who had allowed her to escape had been found on the street by the police, after having been so severely beaten that he required emergency surgery, and died on the operating table. The whips did not stand over Louisa while she was in the cell with Blasko, locked in behind steel bars, for there was no way out of the cells. The guards were content at such times to sit at the desk in the anteroom, watching the small portable television and playing cards as the woman and the Gypsy jabbered away in their incomprehensible languages.

And Janos Kaldy sat in motionless silence, staring off into space, speaking only when spoken to, unconcerned and uninterested, submitting to Neville's hypnosis, cooperating with neither enthusiasm nor trepidation. He remained in aloof, morose self-absorption as he awaited the personal hell into which he would be cast with the appearance of the next full moon.

And somewhere, they all knew, Claudia was waiting too.

"Kaldy . . . Kaldy . . ."
"Yes."
"Can you hear me? Do you know who I am?"

"Yes, Doctor."

"Have you reached another moment of importance to you?"

"Yes, Doctor."

"Where are you, Kaldy? What year is it? Do you know?"

"We are walking through the snow . . . there is ice on the branches."

"It is winter?"

"Yes. Winter."

"What year is it?"

"I do not know."

"Where are you?"

"I do not . . . I am not certain . . ."

"Do you have any idea? Any idea at all?"

"It is . . . it is . . . before Poligny."

"Long before? Long before Poligny?"

"No. Five years. Less."

"And where are you, Kaldy? Look and listen. Tell me where you are."

A pause. "The realm of the Ottoman Turks. Yes, we are in the Carpathian Mountains . . . in the realm of the Turks."

"Is Claudia with you?"

"Claudia is always with me."

"Why are you in the Carpathians, Kaldy?"

"To die. We have come to die."

"Why the Carpathians?" No response. "Why do you think that you can die in the Carpathians?"

"While we were in Baghdad we heard rumors . . . stories around campfires . . ."

"Stories about what, Kaldy?"

"Someone there who we hope will be able to kill us. Rumors. Legends."

"Legends about someone who will be able to kill you, Kaldy?" No response. "Who are the legends about? Kaldy, who are the legends about?"

A pause, and then, "Vampires."

. . . They walked in solemn silence along the pitted, winding dirt road that led from the small village up toward the castle standing ominously atop the promontory. It was just past noon. Sunset would not come for another five hours. Claudia ran her

fingers through her hair to dislodge the snow and ice that had settled on it, and wrapped the heavy woolen cloak more tightly around her lithe form. Janus Chaldian wore no cloak, so he merely held the top of his collar closed with his right hand and kept his left hand thrust into the folds of his tattered shirt.

Neither of them was subject to physical harm from the assault of the cold, snow-laden winter wind, but they felt the cold and it made them uncomfortable. They had come a long distance on foot, never bothering to make any substantial preparations for the changes in climate they knew they were to encounter. They had long since ceased to think in such terms, for they were as invulnerable to the numbing cold as they were to spear tips, and the blistering desert sun was as harmless to them as the blade of a sword. When they noticed that they were growing cold, they acquired what clothing they could; when they noticed that they were growing warm, they shed what clothing they had; and it never made the slightest difference in any terms other than temporary comfort. When others died of thirst amid the rolling Arabian sands, they continued on unaffected; when others froze to death on the sweeping Russian steppes, they continued on in their endless, pointless journey.

And so they had come on foot from Syria, a journey which had taken them over a year. In all that time they had not needed to cross the borders of the Ottoman Empire, for in this, the nine hundred and ninety-fourth year since the hegira of the prophet Muhammad (or the one thousand, six hundred and sixteenth year since the birth of Jesus, as the Christians would call it), the Ottoman Empire stretched from the borders of Persia to the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, from the marches of Poland and Hungary to the highlands of Upper Egypt.

And thus when they had set out from Baghdad in the fall of the previous year, they needed to give no thought to border guards or enemy soldiers as they trudged onward through the desert to Damascus; they needed neither identification nor permission, but only gold with which to pay the shipmaster at Tyre for transportation north to Istanbul; and as they walked from the Golden Horn across the hills of Thrace and through the forests of Bulgaria and Wallachia, still they were in the realm of the Ottoman Turks. It was only then, after a journey of a thousand miles, that they found themselves standing before a border as they sought to cross over

into the lands of the Kingdom of Hungary, into the province of Transylvania.

They spent months in the squalid towns and villages, making the inquiries that resulted inevitably in frightened, suspicious looks and evasive answers, until at last they had determined that the object of their quest slept by day in the ruined castle that loomed before them. As they walked onward along the hard, frozen dirt road, Claudia turned to him and asked, "Will he be able to kill us, Janus?"

Janus Chaldian shrugged. "I don't know, Claudia. He seems quite capable of killing, if the stories we have heard are true."

"Yes, capable of killing people. But what about us?"

His response was not exactly irritated, but it was somewhat brusque. "Claudia, I know as little as you know about him, and as little as you know about us. Why do you ask me these questions?"

"You must know more than I do," she replied hotly. "You have suffered from this longer than I have. It was you who made me what I am."

He laughed grimly. "How do you know?" She had no answer to this, and so she fell silent as they continued on to the castle.

It had been more than a century since the castle had been sacked and pillaged by the Turks, but the cracked walls and broken windows, the charred beams and broken battlements remained as mute testimony to the havoc of a bygone war. Janus and Claudia strained their currently human muscles to pull open the iron gate, and then after the slightest hesitation they walked into the courtyard, and from there into the great hall of the castle itself.

Wordlessly they wandered through the ruined fortress, searching the rooms and passageways from level to level, until, shortly before sunset, they found the subterranean crypt which served as the burial place of the princes of the small Carpathian realm. They wandered along the rows of wood and stone sarcophagi, searching for the resting place of the prince who had died at the hands of the Turks over a hundred years before, but who, it was said, had returned from death with his wives to spread misery and panic among the defenseless population. It did not take them long to find his tomb, the tomb of him who since his death a century before had been the plague of the Carpathians.

Janus tried to lift the lid of the sarcophagus, but was unable to

do so unaided. Claudia joined in the effort, and between them they were able to swing the hinged lid upward. Within the stone coffin lay a corpse, a dead and lifeless thing, unremarkable but for the fact that it should have rotted away to nothing years before, but had not. The cold white dead flesh of the corpse made the long gray mustache all the more striking, and the thick dark eyebrows stood out starkly against the pallor. Janus and Claudia dropped the lid shut and then Janus sat down in front of the sarcophagus and waited. Claudia sat down beside him. As the sunlight that streamed in through the small broken window near the ceiling of the vault grew rosy and then gray, she turned to him and said, "Will we have time?"

"Hmmm?"

"Will we have time? To talk to him, to explain what we want. The sun will set in a few minutes, and then the change will come upon us."

"We will have time," he muttered. "You know that. The change doesn't happen immediately. It never does. If the stories are true, he will awaken as soon as the sun sets. We will not change until the sunlight is completely gone and the moon dominates the sky." He looked at her. "Why do you ask me this, Claudia? You know this yourself."

She did not reply. They waited in silence as the gray sky grew black, and then she asked, "Who are we, Janus?"

He sighed. "I don't know, Claudia."

The next few minutes seemed to pass like years, and then the lid of the coffin creaked slowly open.

Janus and Claudia rose quickly to their feet, each experiencing a shiver of excitement that neither had known for many centuries. They watched in silent anticipation as the lid swung completely up and the undead prince rose from his grave. He noticed them instantly; indeed, from the calm expression on his thin hawklike face, one might have assumed that he had been aware of their presence all along. His cold dead lips curled into a cruel smile beneath his gray mustache, and his sharp teeth glistened in the light of what was either the dying sun or the natal moon.

The vampire climbed out of his coffin with a slow, graceful, almost fluid motion, and his right hand had reached out to caress Claudia's throat even before both of his feet had come to rest on the cold stone floor of the crypt. He glanced quickly at Janus, but

the look in his glowing red eyes was too filled with the confidence of power to be described as wary. He seemed merely to be registering the presence of the young man, nothing more.

The vampire pulled Claudia slowly toward him, and she bent her head back obligingly, baring her throat to him. He laughed softly, perhaps relishing what he believed to be his power over mortals, perhaps pleased that his meal had so conveniently found her way to his bedside, and then he pressed the tips of his fangs against her white throat.

It had been many years since the vampire had been surprised by anything, but his face displayed nothing less than astonishment when he found that he could not penetrate the woman's skin; and then he understood. He pushed her away from him and looked from the woman to the man. "*Vroloki,*" he whispered, speaking the language of his people.

"Yes." Janus nodded, addressing the vampire in the language of the Turks. "We are werewolves." He allowed himself the slightest of smiles. "And you, to all appearances, are a vampire."

The vampire stared at him for a long moment and then emitted a bellowing laugh. "And are there now werewolves among the Turks and the Magyars?" he asked in the same tongue. "If so, I fear that between you and us their histories will be brief ones!"

"We are neither Turks nor Magyars," Claudia said. "We do not know whence we come."

"Nor whither go," the vampire said, smiling with genuine amusement. "The common lot of man. Still, it is an odd twist of fortune which brings such as you together with such as we." As he spoke, Janus and Claudia heard soft movements behind them, and they turned to see three shrouded women walking slowly toward them, their burning eyes alive with appetite. The vampire raised his hand and stopped them, saying in the Rumanian tongue, "Spare yourselves the effort, my dears. They are werewolves. Their skin will blunt your teeth. Go feed elsewhere."

The three women looked at each other briefly and then withdrew from the crypt. As the sky outside the castle was suddenly filled with the sound of flapping leathery wings, Janus said, "It is not fortune which brings us here. We have come to enlist your aid."

"Indeed!" The vampire smiled. "How interesting! I have not had occasion to, ah, aid anyone for quite a long time!"

"We want to die," Claudia said.

"Oh, no doubt, no doubt!" He laughed. "Therein rests the difference between your kind and mine. To me, immortality is a gift, a blessing."

"To us it is a curse," Janus said.

"My point precisely," the vampirè responded.

Claudia stepped forward and stared into his eyes, eyes dead, yet alive with merriment and cruelty. "Can you kill us?"

The vampire laughed again. "Apparently not! I fear that were the three of us to keep company solely with one another, we should all soon find ourselves plagued by unsatisfied hunger."

"Do you know how we can be killed?" Janus asked.

"Do I know how you can be killed," he echoed, and then paused as if considering an answer. After a few moments he smiled. "Of course I do," he replied casually. "Such things are not mysteries to one such as I, who am privy to the secrets of hell itself."

"Do not tell us of silver weapons," Claudia said. "We know from long experience that such things cannot harm us."

"Am I an ignorant peasant, *vroloka,* an untutored serf?" he asked her. "I have knowledge, not superstition!"

Janus felt hope surging up in him as he asked, "Then you know how we can be killed? You know how this curse can be ended?"

"Most certainly," he said, leaning back against his coffin. "The solution to your problem is the opposite of its cause—its mirror image, as it were." He smiled again. "Not that my experience with mirrors has been very extensive, of late—"

"Stop your jesting," Claudia demanded. "Tell us what we must do to die."

"Oh, anything that kills mortals will kill you, once the curse has been lifted," the vampire said. "It is lifting the curse that may cause you some difficulty."

"And how can the curse be lifted?" Janus asked, trying not to give voice to his impatience.

"By doing the opposite of that which brought it down upon you in the first place," he replied amicably.

"But we don't *know* what caused this to happen to us!" Claudia screamed. "We can't remember, neither of us can remember anything!"

"It's true." Janus nodded. "The past fades into mist and dark-

ness. I do not know how I became what I am. She says that she has a memory of being attacked by me . . ."

"But I'm not certain," Claudia finished for him. "It may be a memory. It may be a dream."

"No matter." The vampire smiled. "Two elements are involved here. Only one thing creates a werewolf, and only one kind of person, in one kind of situation, can become one. The first element is obvious."

"The bite of another werewolf?" Janus asked.

"Yes," the vampire replied. "The bite of another werewolf. That far the legends are correct."

"And the second element?"

The vampire laughed softly. "Why should I tell you?"

Neither Janus nor Claudia replied at first. Then Claudia said, "To help us rid ourselves of this living hell!"

"Ah, yes, but why should I help you?" When no response seemed to be forthcoming, the vampire suggested, "Out of a feeling of moral obligation? As an act of charity? To free poor defenseless mortals from your bestial depredations?" He began to laugh heartily as Claudia's face grew red with rage. Janus looked at him coldly as the vampire continued, "To strike a blow against the forces of evil? To render aid and succor to my fellowman?"

"As an act of self-defense," Janus replied softly. "As part of a bargain. You tell us what you know, and we will not come back here at sunrise to pound a wooden stake into your chest."

"Oh, my goodness!" the vampire said, feigning surprise at the suggestion.

Claudia grinned at Janus, delighted at his statement. "Yes, self-defense, the oldest motive on earth. If you do not destroy us, we will destroy you."

"An interesting suggestion." The vampire seemed not the least disturbed by the threat.

"We are quite serious," Janus said firmly. "We have killed hundreds of innocent people—"

"Thousands, I would think," the vampire observed.

"—and killing one such as you would be an act of positive goodness, all things considered."

"Ah, yes, my poor *vrolok*," he chuckled, "but you cannot consider all things, because you do not know all things. At least,

you know less about yourselves than I do." He shook his head with mock sorrow. "You pose no threat to me."

"Can you be certain?" Claudia asked, her own uncertainty masked by a tone of menace.

"Certain beyond any doubt." The vampire smiled. "And even if I had doubts, do you think me such a fool that I have only one place to rest during the day? Do you think that come sunrise you will find me lying here waiting for you?"

"I warn you—" Janus began, and then he was struck by the stabbing pain that signaled the onset of the change. He screamed and fell to the floor and was joined a moment later by Claudia, who doubled over and writhed beside him, shrieking in agony.

"Poorly timed, don't you think?" the vampire asked. "You did not plan this well, my poor *vroloki*. You should have waited a few nights, waited for the moon to pass from its fullness. We might then have had a longer conversation, for all the good it would have done you." He watched with amused and curious detachment as their limbs and faces and flesh and bones bent and crackled and bled and shuddered and changed. "You know, I've known about your type of creature for quite a while, but I've never had the opportunity to see one of you in the flesh." His cadaverous brow furrowed thoughtfully. "I'm something of a shape-changer myself, you know . . . one of the powers granted me in exchange for my soul." He pursed his lips and nodded. "Yes. Yes, indeed. I do believe I'll have a try at this. Bats, rats, flies, mist, wind, dust—they all have their uses. But this!" He opened his eyes wide as the werewolves raised themselves unsteadily to their feet. "This is delightful! Most impressive, my dear *vroloki,* most impressive indeed!"

The werewolves leapt at him as with one motion, but the vampire himself leapt upward and shrank himself into the form of a bat before their talons could reach his undead flesh. The bat flew up and attached itself to one of the huge rafters that supported the high ceiling of the vault, and in an instant the vampire again, was hanging from the ceiling, his hands and feet clinging to the wood and stone as if he were a spider. He looked down with calm curiosity as the werewolves jumped at him and raked the empty air with their claws, but the rafters were forty feet from the floor of the huge subterranean crypt and the creatures could not reach him. He spoke to them in tones of quiet amusement as they leapt

again and again, until at last they stood motionless beneath him, looking up and growling angrily. The vampire appraised them, studied them, making note of their form and their movements. Then, satisfied that he had observed all he needed to observe, he released himself from his position and fell downward. Before his feet touched the stone floor he had changed himself into a creature indistinguishable from his two would-be attackers.

The two werewolves looked with confusion at the third, their dim mentalities unable to understand what had happened. There *had* been prey, of that they were certain; but now another of their kind stood before them, growling like them, looking like them, smelling like them. They looked at the third werewolf for a few moments and then followed the instincts of their kind and ran from the room to seek out human flesh and human blood.

The vampire resumed his customary shape after they left him and, after emitting an amused grunt, went in search of his nightly repast.

The sky of the deep, starless night was black but for the brilliant moon that gazed impassively down upon the landscape, so replete with misery and death, and even the sounds of the nocturnal forest animals were momentarily hushed by the strange, piercing, frenzied howls that drifted through the darkness. The sound of the flapping of leathery wings was, of course, nothing new to them; that particular harbinger of death was a permanent fixture of the Transylvanian night. It had been so ever since the Wallachian prince had been killed by the Turks one hundred and forty years before.

The night moved slowly on toward sunrise, and the wreathes of garlic and sanctified crucifixes hung on the locked and bolted windows and doors of straw huts and marble palaces alike as peasant, burgher, and noble slept fitfully, tormented by dreams of the undead. They, at least, were safe from the *nosferatu,* but there were always unwary travelers and foolish skeptics and ignorant foreigners who were able to provide sustenance for the dark prince and his wives; and sunrise showed the people that even garlic and crucifixes and prayers to Christ and His Mother had not sufficed to protect them from the hell's spawn that had ripped and torn and devoured their neighbors.

Sunrise found Janus Chaldian and Claudia lying in the snow a league from the castle of the vampire. Claudia awakened shortly

after Janus, and she rose to find him gazing up at the outline of the fortress against the gray sky of winter dawn. She took a few handfuls of snow and used it to wash the blood and bits of flesh from her mouth and hands before walking over to him. "Shall we destroy him, Janus?"

"Hmmm?"

"Shall we do as we threatened? Shall we destroy him?"

Janus paused thoughtfully and then shook his head. "No. For what purpose?"

"To keep him from killing!"

He laughed sadly. "Yes, let us execute the sheep thief so that we may slaughter all the lambs ourselves."

"But he is evil, Janus."

"And are we good?"

She sighed. "At least we cannot help ourselves. He *can*."

Janus shook his head again. "We don't know that, Claudia. I don't know anything, not really. I don't know what good and evil are anymore. I cannot judge, I cannot act, I cannot reason. All I can do is hope for death." He turned to her. "If you wish to destroy him, go ahead. I'll wait for you here."

She looked up at the distant castle for a few moments and then shook her head. "No. It would not help me to die."

"No," he agreed. "It would not."

She sighed again. "Where shall we go, Janus?"

He shrugged. "What does it matter?"

He began to walk sadly away from the spot where they had awakened, and she followed close behind him at the same funereal pace. They had nowhere in particular to go, but walking seemed preferable to sitting; at least it helped to ward off the annoying cold.

For several years they wandered aimlessly about the Rumanian provinces, stopping only on the nights of the full moon, stopping only to murder. Eventually they wandered into Hungary, and from there into the realm of the Hapsburgs, and from there through the states of the German Empire into the Kingdom of France. It was five years after their encounter with the vampire that they found themselves brought before the Inquisition at Poligny, accused of werewolvery. And in all that time, as it had been throughout the unremembered centuries before, as it was to be throughout the

long centuries to come, their lives were nothing more than a monotonous cycle of sorrow and pain and murder.

"Who are we, Janus?" Claudia would ask over and over again.

"I don't know, Claudia," he would reply.

"Did you make me what I am?"

"I don't know."

"Why can't we die, Janus?"

"I don't know, Claudia. I don't know."

The next cycle of the full moon was three weeks away.

Captain Frederick Bracher studied himself in the mirror on the wall of his quarters in the training compound up in the isolated hills, and he liked what he saw. He liked the uniform of the Marine officer, bedecked as it was with medals. He liked the regulation haircut and the trim, athletic bearing. He had never been a man given to false modesty, and he knew that his face and form exuded health and power and intelligence and, yes, even masculinity and charisma. He felt slightly out of place in the business suits he usually wore, and now, in dress uniform in his office in a military compound, he felt completely at ease.

The compound, which he had been building with Hull's generous financial assistance, was to serve three purposes. Bracher had no illusions about the reliability and usefulness of the hundreds of whips who had been recruited by his agents. True, they were young, strong, and healthy; they fervently hated established authority; and their racial attitudes were correct. But they were a rebellious and undisciplined lot, most of them, and they needed serious military training before they became the shock troops of the coming revolution. The compound was the place where they could receive it, where they could live like soldiers, in barracks instead of rat-hole tenements or tents out in the scrublands.

The compound would also serve as a more secure headquarters than the Hulltech Center. The compound was to be essentially a fort, and defense concerns could thus be observed with greater secrecy and effectiveness than in a scientific research center near populated areas.

And, Bracher thought with a smile, once we've taken over the country, we'll need camps for other purposes.

The compound consisted thus far of fifty acres of land enclosed

by a high stone wall capped with electrified razor wire. Within the confines of the wall, six barrackslike buildings had already been completed, one serving as an administration center and another as a reception hall. At the moment, a large square pit some fifty feet deep was being dug, for reasons known only to Bracher.

Satisfied with his appearance, Bracher left his quarters and proceeded to the reception hall in the north sector of the compound. Here he surveyed the preparations. The catering staff, White Homeland Party sympathizers every one, had followed their orders to the letter, and the aromas of the great variety of hot, appetizing foods even now being brought into the room for the buffet mingled pleasantly with the scent of the hundreds of flowers on the tables. Good, Bracher thought. Excellent.

Dwayne Briggs approached him and saluted. After returning the salute, Bracher asked, "Have the guests begun to arrive?"

"Yes, Captain," Briggs replied. "They're being shown the way here right now."

"Good." Bracher nodded. "Make sure you let me know as soon as Mr. Hull gets here." He began to tell Briggs something else, but then he heard the sounds of footsteps and turned to see Philip Stentz walking into the reception room. Stentz was the leader of one of the numerous small, disjointed neofascist groups around the United States that Bracher and Hull were attempting to absorb into the White Homeland Party.

When Bracher had received a phone call from Creighton Hull three days earlier, informing him that a few dozen of the leaders of the radical right had been invited to Mannering for a conference, Bracher had decided to take advantage of the opportunity to hold a reception for them at the training compound. Bracher's work had so absorbed his energy and his attention that the pleasures of social life seemed a distant memory, and he felt that he both needed and deserved a party.

The guest list included almost all of the people on the FBI's list of racist radicals, and it had been through his contacts in the FBI that Bracher had begun his coordination of the white supremist movements. John Rottkamp of the Aryan Church of Christ; Gary Dankner of the Caucasian Renaissance; Wayne Kessler of the Sorcerers, a radical faction of the already radical Ku Klux Klan; George Brown of the Association of White Parolees; Russell Steyert of the American Nazi Party; and, of course, an honored guest,

the aged German politician and ex-S.S. Colonel Helmuth Schlacht, Bundestag delegate for the NPD from Aachen, West Germany. All of these and many others had been invited, along with their aids and associates, their wives or their mistresses. Hull had expressed a desire to meet John Neville, and so the minister was invited without the option of declining. Louisa was not invited, a fact that afforded her nothing but relief.

Soon the reception room was filled with people, and the musicians in the corner farthest from the door played Haydn's String Quartet in C major as a background to the conviviality. The choice of musical selection had been made quite consciously to honor Colonel Schlacht, for the melody of the Haydn piece had been adopted for the German national anthem during the last century. Bracher thought himself the perfect host as he moved around the room, making introductions, engaging in light and superficial conversation, flirting easily with the women and discussing economics and politics with the men.

A movement near the open doors of the reception room caught his eye, and he turned to see a stunningly beautiful woman in a long black silk evening gown entering the room. It took him a moment to realize that the woman was Petra Loewenstein. Bracher smiled and walked over to meet her in the middle of the dance floor, saying, "Miss Loewenstein, you look absolutely ravishing!"

She returned his smile. "Why, thank you, Captain. And thanks for the invitation."

"My pleasure," he replied honestly. "If I'd known I had such a beauty on my staff, I'd have held social gatherings like this more often."

She laughed. "You can correct that oversight easily enough, Captain."

"I mustn't hide you away in the laboratory," Bracher said. "This gown is much more flattering than your lab coat."

"Yes, but it's not as practical."

Bracher continued the flirtatious repartee as he studied her more closely. The sides of her long black hair had been rolled up tightly against her temples and the back had been pulled into a chignon. The effect was to accentuate her high cheekbones and long, unblemished neck. Her gown, which shimmered in the light from the chandelier, was low-cut and hugged her lithe form from shoul-

der to mid-thigh, where it billowed out slightly to an inch from the floor. Her makeup was understated to a delightful effect, and the single golden chain that hung from her neck contrasted dramatically with the ivory hue of her skin and the jet black of her gown. Bracher found himself momentarily at a loss for something to say, so he simply repeated, "You look absolutely ravishing!"

The restatement was so obviously honest that Petra flushed slightly and lowered her eyes. "Captain, please! You'll turn my head!"

Bracher began to say that such a movement would afford him the pleasure of watching her from behind, when he saw Briggs waving at him and pointing toward the door. "I think that Mr. Hull has arrived. Shall we go and greet him?" He extended his arm to her.

She placed her hand upon it gently and replied, "I would count it a great privilege, Captain." Her words and the manner in which she spoke them so combined formality with inviting submissiveness that Bracher felt a desire for Petra, a desire more elemental than he had felt for any woman for many years.

He and Petra walked through the reception room to the door, and the captain noticed from the corner of his eye the heads of men turning to look at Petra. I understand perfectly, he thought. I myself never noticed the exquisite beauty of this woman. He repressed a smile. But I have more than enough time to make up for that.

They reached the door just as Hull and his staff entered. Hull shook Bracher's hand amicably. "This is a pleasant surprise, Bracher," the diminutive old reactionary said, smiling broadly. "Thank you."

"Everyone here is honored by your presence, Mr. Hull," the captain responded. "You visit North Dakota so infrequently, and this is so important an occasion that I felt I should . . . well, make this more than a cold lunch." He put his hand on the small of Petra's back and pushed her gently forward. "Allow me to introduce Miss Petra Loewenstein."

Petra smiled. "Mr. Hull."

"Miss Loewenstein," Hull responded, nodding politely. He recognized the name but was unable to place it.

"Miss Loewenstein is the chemist who was transferred to the

Lycanthropos project by Dr. Raymore," Bracher said. "She has made great progress in researching the . . . phenomenon, shall we say, of the Gypsy Kaldy."

Hull's brows arched. "Oh, so you're the chemist! I've read about your work in Bracher's reports!" She smiled impishly and laughed as Hull feigned distress. "But I must be working Raymore too hard. Only a madman would allow you to be transferred away from him."

Bracher saw that Hull was in high spirits, and he said, "We have champagne and hors d'oeuvres, Mr. Hull. Some of our local . . . friends have prepared them." As he spoke, the musicians began to play a Strauss waltz.

"Thank you, Bracher. That would hit the spot." He frowned, feigning disapproval. "Champagne, you say? I hope I'm not paying for it!" They all laughed, and then Hull said, "And later I want to meet with you and Miss Loewenstein privately to discuss your progress. I've been reading your reports with great care and interest." He looked around quizzically. "By the way, where is the psychologist?"

"John, my cousin's husband?" Bracher looked around the room. "He should be here somewhere. He'd damned well *better* be around here somewhere."

"I'd like to meet him too." Hull paused. "A pity about Pratt."

"Yes," Bracher lied. "We'll miss him."

"Another of these creatures, you said in your report." Hull shook his head. "Incredible."

"Yes, very hard to believe," Bracher agreed. "We'll capture her too, of course, eventually."

"Of course, of course." Hull nodded. "Pratt's death is a great loss. When we've finally taken over, we'll give him every possible posthumous honor."

"No one deserves a posthumous honor more than Professor Pratt," Petra said, glancing at Bracher and smiling. Bracher knew what she meant, and he pursed his lips to keep from laughing.

"Well, Bracher," Hull said, "I do believe that I'm going to go and explore the champagne and greet some of our other guests. If you will excuse me, Miss Loewenstein?"

"Of course, Mr. Hull," Petra said, and watched as the little man walked away.

The lilting melody of the Strauss waltz had filled the room, and Bracher turned to Petra. "Would you care to dance, Miss Loewenstein?"

"Thank you, Captain." She smiled demurely. "I'd love to."

She took his arm again and they walked to the center of the room, where numerous people were already dancing to the flowing strains of the waltz. As they danced, Bracher relished the sensation of his hand on the cool silk covering the soft, silky body. His clear blue eyes gazed into her warm brown eyes, and they whirled about the room without speaking. The music played on and on.

The next cycle of the full moon was two weeks away.

"We are rolling back the years, Kaldy, moving farther and farther into the past."

"Yes . . . the past."

"Where are you now, Kaldy?"

"Khanbaluc . . . we are in Khanbaluc."

"You are in the realm of the Mongols?"

"Yes . . . Khanbaluc."

"When are you in Khanbaluc, Kaldy?"

"I do not know. Temujin is Khan . . . Temujin . . ."

"Who is Temujin, Kaldy?"

"The Genghis Kha Khan . . . Temujin is called the Genghis Kha Khan."

"You have come to see Genghis Khan? It is the thirteenth century, and you have come to see Genghis Khan?"

"No . . . a shaman . . . we heard of a Mongol shaman called Jagatuik."

"You seek to die at the hands of Jagatuik, Kaldy?"

"Yes . . . yes . . ."

"What is happening? What is Jagatuik telling you and Claudia?"

"Nothing . . . nothing . . . ignorant sheep herders . . . they worship thunder . . . they know nothing . . . they know nothing . . ."

"Back farther, Kaldy, back farther into your past."

"Yes . . . the past . . ."

"The years are moving backward, Kaldy, backward."

"Yes . . . yes . . ."

"Where are you now, Kaldy?"

"Novgorod . . . new city . . . Novgorod . . ."
"You are in Russia? You are in Novgorod in Russia?"
"There is no Russia . . . the Varangians . . . Rurik of the Rus . . ."
"Why are you in Novgorod, Kaldy?"
"To die . . . shamans . . . warriors with horned helmets . . ."
"Do you learn anything from these shamans?"
"No . . . nothing . . . ignorance . . . ignorance . . . barbarians . . ."
"Back farther, Kaldy. Go back farther. Remember the past."
"Yes . . . yes . . ." A pause. "Myrdden . . . Myrdden . . ."
"Where are you, Kaldy? When are you?"
"Myrdden . . ."
"Is Myrdden a place, Kaldy? Where is Myrdden?"
"Myrdden is a man . . . a sorcerer. . . ."

. . . Gwynyth and Liam huddled together contentedly beneath the sheltering outcrop of rock affording them protection from the cold, wet wind. Neither Gwynyth's father the shepherd nor Liam's father the oat grower knew that their children had crept quietly from their small stone houses after sunset to keep this sweetly wicked assignation, and if all went well they would both be back sleeping on their straw beds before the cock crow awakened their elders.

Gwynyth gazed lovingly into the eyes of her love, delighting in his smooth, beardless face and unfurrowed brow, and Liam returned her wordless devotion as he studied her long auburn hair and her inviting ruby lips. "You are the world to me, dearest Gwynyth," he whispered.

"And you to me, Liam, Liam," she repeated softly, gently stroking his cheek.

"We shall marry come springtime, when you are of age," he said, his expression and tone bespeaking that serious certainty which the end of childhood leaves new adulthood as a passing heritage. "I shall persuade your father, and if he still refuses, we shall leave together."

"Oh, Liam, where shall we go?" she asked happily, relishing the prospect of adventure and excitement.

"North, to Pictland perhaps," he replied. "Or south, across the water to Belgia. It doesn't matter, as long as we are together."

"As long as we are together," she murmured, leaning her face forward and pressing her lips to his.

"Children!" a deep, aged voice called out to them from the misty darkness. "What do you here?"

They jumped to their feet, startled and frightened, all semblance of adulthood lost in the childish fear of discovery. Gwynyth smoothed her skirts nervously as Liam asked with shaking voice, "Who . . . who is there?"

The mist seemed to part and an old man approached them slowly. His face was a mass of wrinkles and his snow-white beard was wide and long, covering his body from mouth to waist, hiding much of his thick robe, which was a purple so dark as to be almost black. He leaned on a thick, gnarled staff that had been smoothed and polished so that the moonlight was clearly reflected in the shiny wood. "You know me, Liam mac Ceorn," the old man said ominously, "as do you, Gwynyth ap Glendyn. Are you children fools to be out here alone in the darkness on this night?"

"L-Lord Myrdden," the girl stammered. "We meant no harm. We wished merely to . . . we wished merely to—"

"Aye, I know what you wished," the old man growled angrily, the moonlight illuminating his furious visage while the deep darkness masked the amused twinkle in his ancient eyes. "And did you not hear the warning, foolish children? Were you not present in the village when the words were spoken last week?"

"Y-yes, Lord Myrdden, but—" Gwynyth began.

"And what words were spoken, foolish ones? What was the warning I gave to the people of the village?"

"You . . . you told us of the beast, Lord Myrdden."

"Yes, I told you of the beast!" the old man shouted. "The beast which prowls about on the nights of the full moon, the beast which kills and devours little idiots like the two of you, the beast which has already killed many in our land. I told you of the werewolf, did I not?"

"Yes . . . yes, Lord Myrdden," Liam said. "But we meant no disobedience. I love Gwynyth, and—"

"Silence!" the patriarch bellowed. "Hie ye to your homes at once, and be thankful that I do not pull you back to your fathers by your hair, impudent cubs! Get ye gone!" He shouted the last words in a voice of wrath and doom. The boy and girl ran from him in different directions, and he waited until they had disap-

peared into the distance before allowing himself to chuckle at their innocence and discomfiture. The old man shook his head in amused exasperation and then continued his slow, self-appointed patrol. He reached into the pocket of his cloak and assured himself for the hundredth time that night that he had not forgotten to bring the bane flowers with him from his high tower. Satisfied that he had, he walked slowly forward, straining his ears and squinting his eyes, looking, watching, searching.

Ears much younger than his would have been able to hear the terrified scream that shattered the cold night, and he hobbled onward in the direction of the sound as quickly as his stiff old legs would carry him.

But he was too late to save young Liam. By the time he reached the clearing, one of the creatures had already torn off one of the boy's legs and was biting hunks of flesh from it, while the other was ripping into the motionless chest with its talons, greedily seeking the sweet, blood-rich heart. The werewolves heard the old man approach, and they looked up at him menacingly, snarls of warning and growls of anger rumbling forth in a mad, hellish duet.

As they prepared to spring at him, the old man dropped his staff and filled both his hands with the plant from his deep pocket. The creatures were not prepared for what happened next, for the old man, displaying a strength which denied his age, himself leapt at them and pressed the plants into their faces. The creatures felt an instantaneous impotence, a numbing weakness, and as they fell to the ground, the old man knelt between them and pressed the plant more forcefully down upon them. The creatures seemed to lose consciousness. They lay insensate upon the wet forest floor and the old man remained motionless between them, praying that he would be able to maintain his vigil until dawn.

The hours passed slowly, and still the old man did not move, still the werewolves were held captive by the potent flowers. Insects and rodents began to feast happily upon the shattered remains of Liam mac Ceorn, but the old man did not shoo them away. He did not move. He dared not move.

As the sun rose, the creatures slowly resumed their human forms, and the old man allowed himself to fall backward upon his weary haunches as the werewolves were replaced by a thin, pale young man and a dark-haired woman. A few moments after

the change was complete, they opened their eyes and sat up. They looked at the old man and then over at the carnage a few yards away.

"Your doing, beasts," the old man said, his voice mingling sorrow and rage.

The woman shook her head and replied in the Latin language, "We know not your tongue, old one. Do you know the tongue of the Romans?"

"I do," the old man replied in Latin, "for the days when the Romans ruled our island are a memory to me, though but a legend to the young. But you are not legends, beasts! You declare your reality and sign your names in blood!"

The young man was looking at the plants. "What are these weak chains with which you bind us?"

The old man's eyebrows rose in surprise. "You remember, monster?"

"Dimly," he replied. "As through night and fog."

The old man nodded. "What matters the name of the plant? Chains are chains, and these chains shall bind you always." He paused. "Who are you? You are not Britons, surely."

"I am called Ianus the Chaldean," the young man said. "It is true that I am not a Briton. I know not the land of my father, nor the name of my father. I know not what I am, nor why I am what I am."

"And how is this?"

"Time, ancient one, time. Memory fades after a hundred thousand sunsets."

"But not yet for me," the woman replied hotly, "for not yet five centuries have passed since he made me what I am. I can feel my past crumbling within my mind, and yet still I know, still I know."

"And what do you know, woman?" the old man asked gently, beginning to feel pity for them despite his hatred and fear, despite the rotting body whose members lay strewn about the clearing.

"My name is Claudia Procula," she replied. "I am a Roman lady of a good family, and was content with my life until Ianus visited this curse upon me."

"And what is your family, Lady Claudia?"

She strained her mind to think for a moment, and then shook her head. "Lost, lost. The name is gone, the image is dying."

The old man looked at Ianus the Chaldean and asked, "Why have you come to Britannia? Rome is far from here, and the land of the Chaldeans farther still. Your cities, Ur and Babylon, are so distant that they are known to us only in the tales told by the Christian priests."

"I do not know that I am a Chaldean," Ianus replied. "It is merely what I am called. And we have journeyed here in search of help."

"Help!" The old man laughed sadly. "Can you not kill on your own?"

"We do not wish to kill," the woman said. "We wish to die."

"Yes," her companion agreed. "We wish to die. In Gaul we heard of a great wizard in the lands of Britannia. We have come to seek him out, that he may kill us."

"I am called Myrdden," the old man said, "and the ignorance of the people leads them to call me a wizard, though my magic is knowledge and my powers are but the truths known to the ancients."

Claudia shook her head. "Myrdden is not the name we have heard."

"I am also called Merlinus, in the Roman tongue."

They looked at each other and then Ianus sighed and nodded. "Then you are the wizard we seek, Merlinus. Can you help us?"

"Can you kill us?" Claudia asked.

Merlin shook his head. "I have no such power. But, with the plant, I can control you. I can bind you on the nights of the full moon and I can affix the plants to you, and I can watch over you . . ."

And so it was throughout the last years of the life of the wizard, and through the years of the life of his apprentice; but all was lost when the Britons were driven into the mountains of Wales by the invaders, by the Angles and the Saxons and the Jutes. The knowledge was lost, the power of the plant was forgotten, the line of Merlin was ended. And as the sixth century became the seventh, the black nights of the new dark age were again host to the murderous lusts of the creatures, and the painful cycle began again, and the blood flowed, and the wails of mourning rose into the dawn skies, and the years passed in slow and sorrowful progression for Claudia Procula and Ianus the Chaldean, and they wrote their names in blood from Britain to Novgorod to Khanbaluc to the

Carpathians, from the fields of France to the plains of Hungary and beyond.

And soon, even Claudia could not remember who she was.

The next cycle of the full moon was one week away.

Janos Kaldy lay silently upon the cold stone floor of the prison cell in the Hulltech Center and stared up at the ceiling pensively. Why is it, he wondered, that this minister can strip away the layers of memory and reveal to me what lies beneath them, and yet I cannot do this myself? Is it some special skill, this hypnosis, some hidden art? Certainly not. He speaks to me, has me concentrate on his voice, has me stare at something, and then he strips away the layers of time. Can I not do this thing alone, without him? Can I not dig down into the dungeon of my own mind and remember who I am and how I became the thing I am?

Kaldy closed his eyes. Relax, he ordered himself. Breathe deeply. Empty the mind of thought. Allow the images to surface. Do not fight them, do not resist them. Allow them to float upward from the darkness. Remember. Remember.

Time passed, and Kaldy lay immobile upon the stone floor. Blasko sat nearby, watching him, not knowing what his friend was doing, but knowing that Kaldy could not be sleeping, for Kaldy never slept; knowing that Kaldy could not be resting, for Kaldy never tired. Blasko watched in silence.

Kaldy's consciousness sank deep into the nether recesses of his being, and very slowly images began to float upward from the darkness of his benighted memory into the light of subdued awareness. His eyes remained closed, and for an instant he found himself standing in the crypt in the ruins of the vampire's castle, gazing up at the rafters from which the vampire hung like a spider. "You threaten me with death, foolish *vroloki*," the vampire was saying. "Do you not know that if you were capable of waging war against the darkness, you would not be the cursed creatures that you are?"

Pain!

Kaldy's body rocked with agony and he felt as if his head were about to explode, but the images continued to surface, and each new image brought with it a stab of pain.

"I shall keep you here until the end of my days, demons," Nostradamus was shouting into the still-open entrance to the

stronghold, "and I shall see to it that you remain here until the end of time."

Pain!

Myrdden was binding them with thick ropes, and the flowers were covering them.

Pain!

"Haitaumash kakoshenkar, mashkamash kakosheshkar."

Pain!

Desert winds. Sweat and offal. Fear and desire. Youth and hope and trust and

Pain!

Haitaumash kakoshenkar, mashkamash kakosheshkar, haitaumash kakoshenkar mashkamash kakosheshkar, haitaumash kakoshenkar mashkamash kakosheshkar haitaumashkakoshenkar mashkamashkakosheshkar haitaumashkakoshenkarmashkamashkakosheshkarhaitaumashkakoshenkarmashkamashkakosheshkarhaitaumaskakoshenkarmashkamaskakosheshkarhaitaumashkakoshenkarmashkamash

PAIN.

PAIN!

PAIN!

Kaldy screamed and grabbed his head. He rolled over onto his side and his thin body shuddered. Blasko rushed over to him and took him in his arms and began to rock him as if he were a baby, muttering, "Janos, Janos, poor Janos!"

Janos Kaldy's pain subsided, and he began to weep. He wept for himself and his long, tortured immortality. He wept for Claudia. He wept for the thousands of innocent lives he had taken over the long centuries. He wept and wept and wept.

And the days passed and Kaldy awaited the full moon, as Neville pried and Petra experimented and Blasko worried and Louisa sulked and Bracher killed.

And then at last the full moon was less than two days away.

14

"So?" Frederick Bracher asked as he sat behind his desk, cleaning his pistol. "You've read the report from California. What do you make of it?" Bracher seemed angry, though he had thus far given no indication of the source of his anger.

Neville frowned thoughtfully as he read the brief letter Hulltech had just received from Professor Langhorst, the internationally known and respected philologist from UCLA. Petra Loewenstein, who was seated in the chair next to his, craned her neck in an unsuccessful attempt to read the paper he was holding. "It's . . . well, confusing, to say the least," Neville commented.

"To say the least." Bracher nodded, his angry steel-blue eyes boring into the nervous minister. "And it certainly helps us learn about Kaldy's origins, doesn't it!" His voice was cold and sarcastic.

"It may." The minister nodded slowly. "It may at least help us to establish a date for his . . . well, not his birth, but . . ."

"Doctor," Petra asked, "can I have a look?"

"Oh, yes, certainly, certainly," he replied, handing her the letter. She read through it quickly and then handed it back to him without comment. "Any thoughts, Petra?"

"No, I'm afraid not," she replied. "I've heard of the Magi from the Christmas story of course . . . the so-called Wise Men, I mean, but . . ."

"Has it ever occurred to you, John, that our friend Kaldy is playing you for a fool?" Bracher asked.

"N-no, Frederick," Neville stammered. "Why would you think . . . ?"

Bracher allowed the pistol to drop heavily on his desk, and both Neville and Petra started slightly at the unexpected thud. "Let us review the facts, shall we?" he said with a deadly chill in his

voice. "Kaldy agrees to cooperate with us, agrees to allow you to attempt a hypnotic regression so that we can uncover the source of his power. He claims, of course, not to know his own origin, a rather ridiculous notion, in my opinion. And what are the results of the regressions and the questioning?"

"Well . . ." Neville began to reply to what he knew to be a rhetorical question.

"Shut up, John!" Bracher snapped. Neville seemed to shrink down into the chair as Bracher went on, "He tells you a few foolish stories about Nostradamus and Dracula and Merlin, and you believe him! A French prophet, a Rumanian vampire, and a British wizard!"

"But, Frederick, I assure you—"

"He's been lying to you, you stupid ass!" Bracher shouted. "He has been telling you fairy tales. Astrologers and magicians and the living dead! God in heaven, John, how gullible can you be?"

"But—"

"And now he brings Jesus Christ into his private little joke! The Magi, John? The goddamned *Magi*?"

"F-F-Frederick, he . . . he didn't say anything about the Lord—"

"Oh, no, of course not," Bracher spit. "That would have been too transparent, too easy for us to see through . . . or should I say, too easy for *you* to see through. It's all crystal clear to me."

"Frederick, please," Neville implored, beginning to sweat profusely. "There are a variety of interpre—"

"Oh, Neville, you idiot!" Bracher said as he snatched the paper from Neville's trembling hand and began to read it aloud. " 'The phrase you transcribed, though the transliteration is poor, seems to be in the Gathic language of ancient Iran; at least, it is similar to the language used in the Gathas, the oldest section of the Zoroastrian scripture, the *Avesta*.' " Bracher looked up. "Following this so far?" he asked sarcastically.

"Frederick . . ." he began cautiously.

"Good." He looked back down at the page. " 'The phrase translates as "Conquer the evil within, battle the evil without." It is, to the best of my knowledge, part of a ritual incantation, or possibly a prayer, of the Zoroastrian priesthood known to us as the Magi, from the Greek *magoi*. The word is related to the Latin

magus, meaning magician.' " The captain looked at his cousin's husband and asked, "A relatively clear series of sentences, don't you think?"

"Of course, of course. But, Frederick, I honestly don't see—"

"You don't see anything, John!" Bracher shouted. "The next thing we know, Kaldy will be telling us that Jesus Christ himself turned him into a werewolf!"

Neville allowed himself a slight tentative smile. "I hardly think so, Frederick. Theologically, such an assertion would be—"

"John, shut up and listen to me very carefully." He leaned forward over his desk and Neville tried to withdraw even farther back into the cushions of the chair as Bracher said, "I conscripted you for this project because I needed someone with specialized knowledge who would be able to keep quiet and do what he was told. But I most certainly did *not* expect you to be so stupid that you'd let yourself be tricked by an ignorant subhuman freak!" He paused and closed his eyes, as if seeking to restrain his fury. "The moon will be full in less than twenty-four hours. Now, Miss Loewenstein here has done her job quite well, and we have a formula which she says should have the sort of effect we have been seeking. We're going to test it today, first on one of our detainees and then, if it doesn't result in death, on a select group of volunteers from my own command. If all goes as planned, we'll have our invulnerable soldiers before the week is out, and then we won't have any further need for Kaldy or his friend Blasko." He paused meaningfully. "And if you haven't been able to discover anything of use about the origin of this condition, I won't have any use for you, either. Do I make myself clear?"

"F-F-Frederick—"

"I've tolerated your stupidity and Louisa's insolence for as long as I intend to," he said coldly. "If you don't come up with some reliable facts about this creature, I'll use you and Louisa the next time I need test subjects for an experiment!"

"What about Kaldy?" Petra asked softly. "And what about Claudia?"

He turned to her angrily. "What about them?"

"We have to be able to destroy them, Captain," she replied. "They're dangerous. They're deadly."

"If worse comes to worst, we'll just let Raymore figure it out,

after we've captured the female," he said. "Anything that's alive can be killed. I'm sure he can handle the job." He turned back to Neville. "Now, you go back to your little Gypsy and tell him that I don't intend to indulge him any longer. And get me some intelligent facts, John, or so help me, you won't live out the week! Now, get out of here!"

"Frederick—"

"*Out!*" he screamed, and Neville leapt from the chair and rushed out of the room. A few moments of strained silence ensued, after which Bracher turned to Petra and snapped, "Report."

"Yes, Captain," she said quietly, well aware of the fury that simmered beneath Bracher's cold surface, and not wishing to excite it. "As you know, we've been conducting experiments over the past four weeks—"

"I know that, Miss Loewenstein," he interrupted. "Don't tell me what I already know."

"Sorry." She paused and then said, "Well, I'm pretty sure that the deaths of the test subjects so far have not been the result of the relative ratios of the chemicals, but of the concentration of the solution itself."

"And so you've diluted it," he said impatiently. "I know. Go on."

"Yes, and I believe that I've achieved a level that is both effective and nontoxic. Though we won't know for sure until we have tested it."

He nodded. "What makes you think it's effective and nontoxic? You haven't injected it into a test subject yet."

"First of all, I withdrew some living marrow from a . . . a detainee, and then infused it with the solution. The marrow died almost immediately, but not before it produced a few red blood cells. Then I put those cells in a petri dish and grew a culture from them. The cells divided and subdivided normally at first, but very quickly they not only stopped multiplying, they also didn't deteriorate, not even when I passed an electric charge through them."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning," Petra replied, "that after absorbing the solution, the bone marrow produced red blood cells which both ceased the normal process of growth and also displayed a resistance to breakdown."

Bracher nodded. "In other words, they don't grow, they don't age, and they don't die."

"That's what it looks like."

He smiled. "Good. Excellent. And the test subject? Do you have one ready?"

She nodded. "Yes, your men have him trussed up in the laboratory. I have to warn you, though, Captain . . ."

"There's no need to warn me about the dangers of creating more of these creatures. We have an ample supply of wolfsbane."

She shook her head. "No, not that. By diluting the enzyme, we may have weakened its effects. We have no way of knowing for certain what level of effectiveness the solution will have—"

"Until we test it," he finished for her. "Well, let's do just that." Bracher rose from his desk and walked to the door. He held it open for her and she nodded her acceptance of the courtesy. Bracher glanced at Briggs, who fell into line behind Bracher and Petra as they went out into the corridor.

As they walked toward Petra's laboratory, she said, "Of course, there are new problems we're going to have to deal with if this test is successful."

"I've thought of a few myself," he said. "What problems are you thinking about?"

"Well, if we're able to accomplish what you want us to accomplish, we'll be able to create your invulnerable soldiers; but when the full moon rises, they'll pose a threat to everyone, not just to our enemies. They'll *be* our enemies!"

"Let me guess. You're about to suggest that we stop our research until we've discovered how these creatures can be killed."

She smiled at him, deciding to be flattering. "Captain Bracher, you can read me like a book."

He was duly flattered. "A not uncommon skill among true leaders, Miss Loewenstein."

"Yes, we have to be able to kill them. You're correct, of course. These creatures are invulnerable, but when they're in their wolf form they're also murderous, deadly, dangerous."

"We have the wolfsbane. We can control them."

"Yes, one or two," she objected. "But, Captain, you're talking about an army large enough to take control of the entire United States. Is there enough wolfsbane or are there enough guards to

deal with a thousand of these creatures, or ten thousand, or a hundred thousand?''

He laughed. ''Your fears are interesting, but a bit foolish.''

She bridled slightly. ''Oh, really!''

''If this thing works, I'll begin to build my new elite corps from the whip kids who hang on my every word and think my feet don't touch the ground when I walk. Briggs has already compiled a list of volunteers who will be ready to try the serum once we've perfected it. They'll do whatever I tell them to do. And is it so hard to work out a procedure for them to follow before each full moon, of one binding another with chains and wolfsbane, and that one then being bound by a third, and the third by a fourth, and so on? If it's done by squad, how long would it take before they were all securely tied up?''

''But the supply of wolfsbane—''

''Please, please,'' Bracher said, feigning impatience but secretly enjoying enlightening the woman. ''When an army moves, it attends to the most minute details of supply. Food, ammunition, fuel, medicines, clothing, weapons, machinery—it all has to be projected, produced, allocated, transported. Do you really think that organizing the supply and shipment of wolfsbane would be a problem for a career military officer like me?'' He awaited a reply, but none was forthcoming. He stopped walking and placed his hands on Petra's shoulders, turning her gently to face him. ''Miss Loewenstein, I know you want to have the pleasure of killing the creature who killed your family. I promise you that once we're satisfied that the process works, we'll capture this other werewolf, and we'll discover a way to destroy her and Kaldy.'' He smiled. ''Besides, you're making at least one good point. The day may come when our . . . our pseudo-lycanthropes will have served their purpose and may indeed present a danger to the white race. We'll certainly have to know how to get rid of them when and if that day comes.''

She bowed her head slightly to signal acceptance. ''I'm glad that we can agree on at least that much, Captain. But I'd still feel a lot safer if we knew how to kill them before we started creating an army of them.''

Bracher began again to walk toward the laboratory. ''Your concern is noted, Miss Loewenstein.'' She followed behind him

wordlessly as Briggs, ever the silent and attentive subordinate, brought up the rear.

As they approached the laboratory on the ground floor of the Center, John Neville was tapping his foot impatiently as a guard unlocked the door to the cell in which Kaldy and Blasko were being held. The minister entered to find his wife sitting on a stool beside the old Gypsy, laughing as Blasko recounted some apparently amusing experience from his past. Inasmuch as Blasko was speaking Romansch and Louisa was responding in Italian, Neville had no idea what either of them was saying. They looked at him as he entered the cell, and the pleasant smile on Louisa's face was replaced by one of distaste. Blasko fell silent and watched Neville, who ignored them completely and stopped in front of Kaldy. Kaldy was leaning back against the wall of the cell, staring off at nothing. Neville mustered up as much authority as he could manage, and snapped, "Captain Bracher and I have come to the conclusion that you've been playing us for fools!"

Kaldy's head moved slowly in Neville's direction, and after gazing impassively at him for a few moments, Kaldy said, "I am sorry to say that neither you nor Captain Bracher need any assistance from me in such matters."

"Kaldy, I'm quite serious, and damned annoyed," Neville said angrily. "I've had a translation made of the gibberish you came out with a few weeks ago, and the only explanation I can come up with is that you've been fabricating the tales you've been spinning." He harrumphed. "I don't believe that you've ever really been hypnotized by me at all! I think you've been indulging your whimsy by making up stories!"

Louisa had been giving Blasko a running translation of what was being said, but she stopped speaking Italian and addressed her husband in English. "What are you talking about, John? What's this about a translation?"

"Kaldy seems to think that we're foolish enough to believe that he was one of the Wise Men," Neville said, laughing humorlessly. "Those words he spoke during that very convincing display of emotional fatigue were part of a ritual incantation of the ancient Magi."

"The Magi?" Louisa said. "The Wise Men from the Bible? You must be mistaken, John. I've read the Christmas story a

hundred times, in both Matthew and Luke, and there aren't any incantations—''

''Oh, Louisa, be quiet!'' he said firmly. ''You don't know anything about these matters! Just keep your mouth shut and stay out of this.''

He was attempting to be overpowering in his wrath, but Louisa knew him too well to be impressed. She stood up slowly and walked menacingly toward him. ''And just whom do you think you're talking to?''

He fell back a step, away from Kaldy, his ill-fitting mask of masculine dominance crumbling before his wife's anger. ''Now, now, honey,'' he simpered, ''all I meant was that historical and religious matters like this are things you aren't familiar with—''

''Fine,'' she said, closing her eyes and attempting to control her anger. ''Then why don't you enlighten me, Pastor!'' She seemed to spit the last word at him. ''What's all this about the Wise Men?''

Neville sighed, resigned once again to having lost face and resigned as well to having to explain to his wife a rather intricate bit of religious history. ''Well,'' he said, ''St. Matthew doesn't use the term 'Wise Men.' The Greek word he uses is *magoi*, and it's just centuries of custom that makes us translate that as—''

''Yes, as 'Wise Men,' '' she finished for him impatiently. ''So? Who were they?''

''Well, the Magi were a class of priests in ancient Persia. They existed for centuries before Zoroaster, but eventually they became the dominant figures in the rituals of the Zoroastrian religion.''

''Dzardrusha,'' Kaldy muttered pensively in a faraway voice.

Neville turned back to him, startled. ''What did you say?''

''Dzardrusha,'' he repeated, frowning in perplexity.

Neville's faults may have been legion, but he was at least a scholar with a curious mind, and his academic interest asserted itself over both anger and fear. He knelt beside Kaldy and asked, ''Is that Zoroaster, Kaldy? Is Dzardrusha how you say the name Zoroaster in Persian?''

Kaldy shook his head slowly from side to side. ''I don't know, Doctor.''

''Then why did you say that word?''

"I don't know, Doctor." He shook his head again, vigorously and with frustration. "You were speaking about Zoroaster and the Magi, and the word just bubbled up in my brain." He paused. "Dzardrusha. Dzardrusha." Kaldy sighed. "I don't know what I'm saying."

Neville's brow furrowed in thought, and then his eyes widened. "Wait . . . wait . . ." he said excitedly. "Perhaps there's a connection . . . perhaps . . ."

"John, you want to fill me in here?" Louisa demanded.

He looked up at her. "Do you know anything about the Parsi religion?"

"The what?"

"The Parsi religion, the religion of ancient Iran, the religion founded by the Persian prophet Zoroaster."

She shook her head. "Not a thing."

"Well," he said, rising from his knees, "he was a prophet who lived in ancient Persia some three thousand years ago. No one knows for sure when he lived. Some scholars think it was as recently as twenty-seven hundred years ago or as early as four thousand years ago. It is certain that he lived after the Aryan conquest of Iran, which was at least four thousand years ago." He paused. "There really were a people called the Aryans, you know. They conquered Persia and India at about the same time—"

"John, get to the point!"

"Yes, yes, the point is that Zoroaster was apparently either a monotheist or at least a dualist. He wandered around ancient Iran preaching about one supreme deity, Ahura Mazda, and one primordial force of evil, Angra Mainyu. He said that the entire universe is nothing more than a stage for the eternal struggle between good and evil, between Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu, between absolute righteousness and utter iniquity. And he said that the struggle goes on constantly *within each human being*!"

Louisa began to discern his meaning. "And you think that Mr. Kaldy is . . . is somehow . . ."

"A personification, an embodiment, something like that? It could be. It didn't occur to me until just now, but it could be."

Louisa looked at her husband with astonishment. "John, are you trying to tell me that Mr. Kaldy is suffering from the curse of a pagan god?"

He shook his head, impatient and annoyed, and responded in a rush. "There's a school of thought in progressive theology which accepts the possibility that the Judeo-Christian tradition of God's revelation isn't the only one, that God did reveal himself to Zoroaster as Ahura Mazda, and possibly also to the pharaoh Akhnaton as the monotheos Aton—"

"John, please!" she interrupted. "Slow down, and think, will you? You are a Christian, John! God is God, and that's the end of the matter!"

He paused, closed his eyes, and took a deep breath. "All right, listen to me carefully."

"I always do," she said sarcastically. "I hang on every word."

"I want to remind you of a few things that you already know but probably haven't thought about," he went on, ignoring her remark. "You know what the Babylonian captivity was, do you not?"

"Of course. I read the Bible. I studied in college too, you know that. The Babylonians conquered ancient Judah, destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, and took the Jews as captives to Babylon."

"Right, and they remained there for seventy years, until Babylon itself was conquered and they were sent back to Jerusalem and ordered to build a new temple to the Lord." He paused. "Do you remember who sent them back, who released them, who ordered them to build a new temple?"

"Of course I remember," she said, annoyed at his patronizing attitude. "It was . . ." She stopped speaking as she began to understand his point.

"Cyrus the Great," he finished for her, "the King of Persia, a Zoroastrian! Think about the opening words of the book of the prophet Ezra, Louisa. 'Thus saith Cyrus, the King of Persia: The Lord, the God of heaven, has given unto me all the kingdoms of the earth,' et cetera, et cetera. Don't you see, Louisa? The Jews and the Persians worshiped the same God by different names!"

"John, wait a minute—"

"And when the promise of the Messiah was about to be fulfilled, who do we find wandering into Judea from out of the east to visit the manger in Bethlehem? The Magi, Zoroastrian priests! And there's more, Louisa, there's more. The Hebrews had no concept of the devil before their contact with the Persians in Babylon. The earliest sections of scripture include no explanation of the origin

of evil; for example, in the second book of Samuel it says that God caused King David to conduct a census of Israel, and then punished Israel because the king had conducted a census. Makes no sense, does it?"

"No," she agreed, "not if what you're saying is accurate."

"Oh, it's accurate, all right, believe me. Second Samuel, chapter twenty-four, a very early, possibly contemporary account of the event. But," he said dramatically, "when the same events are recounted in First Chronicles, chapter twenty-one, written *after* the Babylonian captivity, the census is not God's idea, it is *Satan's* idea. Don't you see? The Persians believed in Satan, the devil, and they called him Angra Mainyu; and the Jews incorporated that bit of divine revelation, because it came from the same source!"

Neville was startled to hear Janos Kaldy laughing softly. "This is really very funny, Doctor."

The minister did not know quite how to respond to Kaldy's laughter. "Kaldy, don't you understand? We may have uncovered a clue to the origin of your condition!"

"Don't you realize what you're saying?" Kaldy asked, his laughter subsiding. "You're telling me you think that God made me a werewolf."

Neville did not reply immediately. He remembered Bracher's sarcastic blasphemy of a short time before, and was uncomfortable with the realization that he had in all seriousness suggested essentially the same thing. "Well, I don't mean that—"

"If it's true, of course, it has an amusing side," Kaldy went on. "If I *am* an ancient Persian, it means that I'm the purest Aryan in all America!" He laughed again. "It's good that Pratt is no longer among the living. He'd have to classify me all over again!"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Kaldy," Louisa said, "but I don't find this the least bit funny. The very idea that someone would blame this horrible thing on the Lord . . . !"

"Louisa, I'm not saying that, necessarily—" Neville began.

"Let me put both your minds at rest," Kaldy said. "From the memories our hypnosis sessions have dredged up, it seems that I am at least fifteen hundred years old. I have spoken Latin without being Roman, Spanish without being Spanish or Cuban, French without being French. I have spoken Turkish and Romansch and the language of the Gypsies, without belonging to any of those nations. The fact that I came up with a sentence in ancient Persian

means absolutely nothing. For all we know, I once spoke Chinese and Eskimo."

"Of course, John," Louisa added, relieved and pleased by Kaldy's observations, "you're allowing your stupid scholasticism to interfere with your common sense. You know as well as I do that there's nothing in Christianity or Judaism to allow for the ridiculous, blasphemous nonsense you're talking about." She paused. "And I'll wager that there's nothing in Islam or Zoroaster's religion or in any other legitimate faith either."

Neville nodded slowly as he thought about Kaldy's explanation and Louisa's remarks. "Yes, yes, you're right. I suppose I was just . . . well, carried away by the . . . by the intellectual symmetry of the whole thing."

"Intellectual symmetry," Louisa muttered with exasperation. "May the good Lord protect us from intellectuals."

"Dammit, Louisa," Neville said with uncharacteristic vehemence, "I'm sick and tired of being judged by you! Okay, so I got all wrapped up in a bit of scholarly conjecture. That doesn't change the fact that I'm doing what I have to do, and doing it against my will. Frederick made it very clear to me that unless we uncover some believable facts about Kaldy's origins, he'll have us both killed."

She emitted a curt, scornful laugh. "I'm not afraid of Frederick," she said defensively.

"Then you're an idiot," he replied. "He isn't your little cousin in Sunday school anymore, Louisa. He's a murderer."

"Eyewitness testimony from a willing collaborator," she snapped. "An unimpeachable source!"

"Dammit, Louisa, we're in danger!" he shouted.

"*Donna,*" Blasko asked softly in the liquid tongue of the Alps, "can you take a moment to tell me what you are all saying?"

"What was that?" Neville asked. "What did he say?"

"He wants to know what we are arguing about," she replied testily. "And since I'd rather talk to him than to you anyway, I'm going to tell him."

"You do that," Neville muttered, and then turned to Kaldy. "Lie out flat. We have to try to go back farther in your memory . . ." He paused. "If you're not just playing some stupid game with me . . ."

Kaldy smiled condescendingly as he moved onto his back.

"Doctor, deceiving you wouldn't be worth the effort involved. I cooperate so that my friend Blasko won't be tortured or killed, not yet, anyway, and because of the remote possibility that you just might learn something that will enable me to die."

Captain Frederick Bracher drummed his fingers impatiently on a lab table as Petra Loewenstein watched the second hand of the wall clock make yet another slow, regular circuit. "Has it been long enough?" he asked.

"Another minute, Captain," she replied, keeping her eyes on the clock. "Just to be certain that his bone marrow has assimilated the enzyme and has begun red-cell production."

Neither Bracher nor Petra nor Dwayne Briggs nor the two other whips in the lab paid any attention to Walter Nguyen, onetime assistant bank branch manager, university graduate, loving father, devoted husband, dutiful son, refugee from Vietnam. Nguyen was bound hand and foot, tied to the back of the stiff wooden chair, doubled over in excruciating pain, trembling, sweating, weeping. The solution had been injected directly into the bone in his pelvis five minutes before, and though he screamed in agony, he had not died.

"Time enough," Petra muttered, and then picked up a scalpel and approached the shuddering figure. "Sit up," she ordered coldly. When he did not respond, she pushed his head back and repeated, "I said, sit up!" Nguyen struggled to move his shoulders up to align themselves with his head, and the exertion of his muscles caused a spasm of pain to shoot through his body. He screamed again, but the scream was ignored, just as if it had been the squeak of a white mouse.

Petra placed the blade of the scalpel against Nguyen's forehead and, after a moment's pause, pressed it down and pulled it quickly across the skin from temple to temple. Then she stood back and observed. She turned to Bracher. "No blood, Captain. No cut, no wound, no mark."

Bracher smiled and nodded to one of the guards. "Stand aside, miss, if you please," he said.

Petra complied, and when she was safely away from Nguyen, the guard leveled his submachine gun at the prisoner and opened fire. The series of rapid explosions was deafening in the confines

of the small room, and the smell of gunpowder caused Petra to cough and close her eyes.

When she opened them again, dozens of flattened bits of lead were lying on the floor in front of Nguyen, and the prisoner was still screaming, still weeping. Still alive.

"Yes!" Bracher shouted. "Yes! Reload! Repeat!" The guard removed the spent clip from the gun and replaced it with a fresh one that held another thirty rounds, and then emptied the machine gun once again into the terrified man, with the same results. Bracher grabbed another gun from the hands of the other guard and walked forward. He pointed the barrel directly at the chest of Walter Nguyen and opened fire. Nguyen bounced back from the impact and then fell forward, blood streaming from his chest. His shuddering body ceased to move.

"Is he dead?" Petra asked, her voice strained and excited. "The experiment is a failure?"

"Not at all," Bracher replied, laughing loudly. "The dilution of the enzyme makes it possible for us to kill him, but look! Look!" He gestured at the flattened bullets littering the floor. "We shot him ninety times before we killed him! What are the chances of a soldier being hit by ninety bullets in a battle? To all intents and purposes, this *is* invulnerability, practical invulnerability! This is success, Miss Loewenstein, undreamed-of success!" He turned to Briggs. "Get your friends together and arrange for transportation for all of us to the compound. We'll initiate the final stage of the experiment there."

"Right away, Captain," Briggs replied, and rushed off to comply.

Bracher turned and looked happily at the dead man as he said to Petra, "I'll help you prepare more of the enzyme, enough for fifteen injections. Then I want you to find Neville and tell him to report to my office. I'll have Briggs arrange for him to join me at the compound. But take your time about it, powder your nose first or something. I don't want John to know that he's going somewhere until I've already left Mannering. I don't want to have to ride in the same car with him. The less I see of him, the better."

"As you wish," she said quietly.

Bracher turned to her. "Miss Loewenstein, you seem surprisingly subdued." She shrugged ambiguously. "Don't forget that

when I report this to Hull, you'll be given full credit for the discovery. Your place among the scientific elite of our future new order is secure. A month ago you were one of a dozen chemists on Raymore's staff. A month from now, if I have anything to say about it, and I assure you that I will, you'll have your own staff to assist you in your own research.''

She smiled at him. ''Thank you, Captain, that would be wonderful. Being able to pursue my own independent projects is what I've dreamed of for years. And I know what my own research will be.''

He returned her smile. ''Yes, and I approve. As I told you before, I need to know how to kill them too.'' He took her warm hands in his as he said, ''We'll avenge your family and secure the continent for the white race at one and the same time, Petra, you and I, together.''

Her smile broadened. ''You make it sound like an alliance, Frederick.''

He nodded as he took her into his arms and drew her to him. ''Hitler used to say that the convergence of aims is the soundest basis for cooperation.''

''Well,'' she whispered, ''if Hitler said it, then it certainly must be true,'' and then bent her head back slightly to receive his lips against her own. Bracher's hands dropped from her waist to her buttocks. As they kissed, he closed his eyes and pressed her body against his. She melted into his arms and sighed softly, entwining her arms behind his neck as she ground her belly against him.

But her eyes remained open and cold.

15

"Can you hear me, Kaldy?"

"I hear you, Doctor."

"Backward in time, Kaldy, backward in time . . ."

"Yes . . ."

"Back past Hungary, past France. Back past Rumania and Mongolia and Novgorod and Britannia . . ."

"Yes . . ."

"The centuries are rolling back, Kaldy. The memories are surfacing, you are living the past once again . . ."

"Yes . . . yes . . ."

A long pause. "Where are you now, Kaldy? When are you now?"

"I am in prison. I am chained to a wall in a prison."

"Are you still in the Bastille, Kaldy? Haven't you gone farther into the past?"

"No . . . not the Bastille . . ."

"Is Merlin imprisoning you, Kaldy? Are you still in Merlin's Britain?" No response. "Answer me, Kaldy."

"Merlin . . . I know no Merlin . . . a prison . . . a prison . . ."

"Is Claudia with you, Kaldy? Is Claudia with you in prison?"

"Claudia . . . Claudia . . . I know no Claudia . . ."

"You do not know a woman named Claudia? You have not yet met Claudia?"

"I know no Claudia?"

"What year is it, Kaldy? When are you in prison?"

"Non eum sed meum . . . non eum sed meum . . ."

"What are you saying, Kaldy? 'Not him, but me.' What does that mean, Kaldy? Why are you speaking in Latin? What are you saying?"

"Non eum sed meum . . . peccavi, non peccavit . . ."
"You are guilty but he isn't? Who, Kaldy? Who isn't guilty?"
"Non eum . . . non eum . . . non eum . . ."

Lucius Messalinus Strabo planted a powerful kick into the unprotected side of the sleeping figure that lay motionless in the dust before him. The figure did not stir, and the centurion kicked him once again, deriving some measure of satisfaction at having a helpless object upon which to vent his frustrations. At his age and with his family connections back in Rome—his third cousin married to the nephew of the emperor, after all!—he certainly should have a career more honorable and profitable than the one which had consigned him to the command of a mere century of soldiers in this barbaric pesthole of a city, far from the amenities of civilization.

"Wake up, scum!" he shouted, and directed yet another kick at the motionless man. Strabo laughed and the three soldiers standing nearby joined in his laughter. He looked at them and joked, "He must have had a bit too much wine last night."

"Yes," one of them agreed, still laughing, "he seems to have built up quite a thirst." As he said this, he nodded toward the two mutilated bodies that lay in the dust. It was just after sunrise, but the intense heat of the season seemed already to be putrifying the dead flesh.

"I said wake up!" Strabo shouted once again, punctuating his command with another kick. "I don't really care if you barbarians murder each other, but you won't do it on my watch! The law is the law! Now, wake up!" He kicked the sleeping man yet again.

The supine figure's eyes opened slowly and he raised himself on one elbow and looked around him. He saw the gutted corpses and looked away, not so much repulsed or horrified as reminded of a painful and familiar reality. "You've had a busy night, haven't you?" Strabo asked with cruel humor. "Well, get up, animal. We aren't going to carry you to your execution. I said *get up*!"

Two of the soldiers grabbed the man by the arms and pulled him roughly to his feet. They wrenched his arms back behind him and tied his wrists together with a strip of leather Strabo had pulled from his belt. "I think the procurator has had a busy night," one of them said to Strabo. "Perhaps we should just kill him here and be done with it, and not bother—"

"You know better than that, Plautus," Strabo said. "We have to teach these barbarians the value of Roman law, and we can't do that if we ignore it ourselves. Besides, no matter how bad a night the procurator has had, he would send us all to the galleys if we executed a prisoner without official permission."

Plautus seemed disgruntled. "We killed enough of them last year—"

"That was the suppression of a revolt, the maintenance of order," Strabo pointed out, "not the execution of an apprehended murderer. You know the difference as well as I do, Plautus, and don't pretend otherwise." What is this Tuscan doing in the army? Strabo wondered with disgust. He looked at the prisoner and said, "Come along, piece of filth. I'm not going to waste all morning with you." He turned and began to walk through the already crowded streets toward the procurator's official residence, a building that would have seemed modest in Rome but which was actually opulent in the "barbaric pesthole" of Jerusalem.

The Hellenistic structure in which the Roman procurator Gaius Pontius Pilate lived served many functions simultaneously. The upper level was, of course, the comfortably furnished living quarters of the procurator and his family; the ground level served as the center of administrative activities, including of course the frequent trials at which Pilate sat as the judge from whose sentence there was no appeal, save to the Emperor Tiberius, who never bothered listening to appeals anyway; and the lower level was a windowless, humid, fetid pit encased by the foundation stones of the building, serving as a prison.

The prison did not need to be large, for long-term incarceration had no place in Roman law or Roman custom. Punishments for the commission of crimes were clearly stated, few in number, and quickly carried out; fines for minor offenses, enslavement for not-so-minor offenses, mutilation for certain particularly heinous acts, and of course execution for any one of the long list of capital crimes. Execution for a Roman citizen meant decapitation or, if the state chose to be generous, the privilege of being allowed to commit suicide. For a noncitizen, execution meant being tied or nailed to a piece of wood, which would then be hoisted up and affixed to the top of a tall stake, where the unfortunate criminal would be left hanging to die.

For these reasons, the prison into which the centurion Strabo

threw his prisoner was neither large nor full. Strabo sent for a scribe while his men busied themselves with the task of chaining the prisoner to one of the damp, mossy walls. As a Roman of the upper class, Strabo was of course literate in both Latin and Greek; but he would not demean himself by writing down information about the prisoner with his own hand. That's why these god-cursed Greek scribes are on our payroll, he thought with irritation. Let them earn their wages.

When the scribe arrived, Strabo addressed the prisoner for the first time since arresting him. "What is your name?"

The prisoner shook his head. "I have no idea."

This reply resulted in a resounding punch in the face from Strabo's powerful fist. "Don't waste my time, scum. I asked you a question and I expect an answer. Now, what is your name?"

The prisoner looked up at the centurion with a surprising absence of fear. "I call myself Chaldaeus."

"Yes, and I am Romanus, and Plautus here is Tuscanus, and everyone in this filthy excuse for a city is either Judaeus or Graecus or Syrius," Strabo shouted, punching the prisoner again. "I'm not asking you for your nationality, Chaldean! What is your name?"

The prisoner shrugged again. "I do not know my name. I have forgotten it. I call myself Chaldaeus because my earliest memories are of living in Chaldea. It was from thence that I traveled to this place over three decades ago."

Strabo's face grew red as he listened to this transparent lie, for the prisoner was obviously a man in his twenties. He drove his fist into the prisoner's face once more, noticing but not commenting on the fact that the placid face neither broke nor bled beneath the blows.

"Centurion," the soldier Plautus said, "let's just kill him and be done with it. What difference does it make what his name is?"

"Plautus . . ." Strabo began, a hint of warning in his voice.

"The procurator has been up all night trying to deal with those god-cursed priests. He's been trying to make them understand that Roman law does not allow the execution of anyone innocent of a capital crime, but they keep demanding an execution—"

"I know, Plautus," Strabo interrupted angrily, "but that has nothing to do with anything. Do you think that the procurator would waste so much time on that fanatic if he did not take our

laws seriously? He could just wave his hand and send the madman off to his death and so save himself a good deal of aggravation, but he won't do that, because the law is the law! And if he concerns himself with the law when it involves this Yeshua, then he will concern himself with the law when it involves this—''

''Yeshua?'' the prisoner asked softly. ''Yeshua bar Yoshef, the prophet from Nazareth? He has been arrested?''

Strabo turned back to the prisoner and prepared to strike him again, but then held back as the man's words registered on his angry, tired mind. ''You know this man?'' he asked.

''I have seen him quite frequently,'' Chaldaeus replied. ''I have listened to him preach for many years.''

''I asked you if you know him,'' Strabo repeated tersely.

Chaldaeus sighed. ''No, I have never spoken to him. I have followed him and I have watched him, but I have never spoken to him. It did not seem that it would be of any use.''

This cryptic comment was ignored by Strabo, who turned to Plautus and said, ''Has the procurator interrogated any of Yeshua's followers?''

''I don't think he has,'' the soldier replied. ''I don't believe that any of them stayed around after the arrest.''

Strabo shook his head with disgust. ''There is no such thing as loyalty east of Messina,'' he muttered. ''Plautus, keep an eye on this murderer. I think the procurator will want to know about him.''

He turned and climbed up the dark, narrow flight of stone steps out onto the dusty Judean street. They had approached the building from the rear, and Strabo was not prepared for what greeted him when he turned the corner. The courtyard outside the procurator's residence was packed with people, shouting in their strange, guttural tongue, waving their fists, their faces contorted with hatred. At the top of the wide dais which formed the entranceway to the residence, the procurator was standing and watching the crowd with undisguised disgust, not bothering to lower himself by attempting to make himself heard above the din. Beside him stood a tall thin man, his hands bound in front of his naked body, his beard and back covered with dried blood as fresh blood streamed from the wreath of thorns that encircled his head. Yeshua the preacher, Strabo thought as he pushed his way roughly through the crowd. The soldiers whose shields and javelins provided an

armed barrier between the dais and the courtyard helped to clear his way, and he mounted the steps toward the procurator.

"This man would make himself king," a voice boomed from behind him in thickly accented Greek. Strabo recognized the voice as that of Caiaphas, the corrupt high priest of the religion of this benighted people. "That is treason by Rome's own law! He merits death!"

As Strabo drew closer to Pilate, he heard his commander say to a guard, "Remain here and keep this rabble as subdued as possible. I must think, and I cannot think in the midst of this chaos." Pilate turned and walked back into the building. Strabo quickened his pace to catch up with him.

"My lord," the centurion called out, "we have just arrested a murderer who claims to have listened to this man on many occasions. I thought that perhaps you might wish to interrogate him."

Pilate turned and looked at Strabo. "One of his followers?"

"No, my lord—at least, not by his own admission. But he says that he has heard much of what this Yeshua has said over the past three years."

Pilate seated himself upon an ornately carved wooden chair before a long marble table. "Have him sent here, Strabo. Perhaps I will be fortunate and this prisoner of yours will provide me with legitimate grounds for executing this fanatic."

Strabo nodded curtly to a soldier standing beside the table, and this was all he needed to do to send the soldier off to fetch the prisoner. He knew that Plautus would immediately understand who was being sent for, and so no elaboration was necessary. He turned back to Pilate and said, "I fear that I shall never learn to understand these people, my lord."

"Nor I, Strabo, nor I," Pilate said wearily as he poured himself a flagon of thick red wine. Strabo did not comment on his commander's recently increased intake of the potent vintage, for he reasoned that having to rule as fractious and incomprehensible a people as the Jews would lead any sane man to drink too much wine too early in the day. The procurator swallowed a mouthful of the syrupy liquid and then went on, "The Orient will be our ruination, Strabo. The Egyptians, the Jews, the Syrians—there isn't one rational mind in the whole east of the empire."

"No, my lord," Strabo agreed honestly.

"From the day our fathers flooded Italy with Punic gold and

Punic slaves, we've been deceiving ourselves about our own destiny. We should have let Carthage keep North Africa."

"Yes, my lord," Strabo agreed now dishonestly, not pointing out to his commander that Rome's power was largely built on the ashes of Carthage.

"Were it not Egypt's grain, I would recommend to my wife's great-uncle that we give the whole of the east to the Parthians. Let them deal with these deity-intoxicated madmen."

"Yes, my lord." Strabo knew how the Emperor Tiberius, the great-uncle of Pilate's wife, would respond to such a suggestion. He chose not to mention it.

"What do we get from the east, besides Egyptian grain, Strabo?" Pilate asked rhetorically, and then took another drink. "We get rebellion, disease, ingratitude, and a plethora of absurd religions with which our spoiled and pampered ladies amuse themselves. Isis, Dionysus, Mithras . . . foreigner's gods for bored Romans." He shook his head sadly. "It is to weep, Strabo. It is to weep."

"Yes, my lord."

"The Roman gods don't seem to be good enough for our silly women anymore, Strabo. Every day it seems that some new superstition comes floating in from Syria or Parthia or Palestine. Why, my own wife is fascinated by these mystery religions. Last year she was initiated into some damned Parthian cult, and now she . . ." He turned as he heard soft uncertain footsteps approaching from the rear of the room. As if responding to his mention of her, his wife had descended from the living quarters on the floor above and was walking slowly and unsteadily toward him. When Pilate addressed her, his voice was cold and biting, utterly devoid of affection. He had married her largely because of her connections to the imperial family, and had hoped that such a marriage would serve to advance his career. Her beauty was also an incentive, but there were many beautiful women, and one did not marry for so trivial a reason.

His coldness reflected his anger and frustration, for he, like his subordinate Strabo, felt himself ill-used by the emperor. While others of his acquaintance resided in peaceful luxury in Egypt and Greece and Dalmatia and Italy itself, merrily stealing fortunes from the subject populations, Pilate had been consigned to Judea, the most notorious festering boil on the body of the empire. Is it

my fault, he often asked himself, that in the bloody internal strife of the family of the Caesars, I, Pilate, have married into a branch out of favor with Tiberius? I should have married Drusilla, he thought, Caligula's sister. Now, *that* would have been both profitable and safe. He made no attempt to mask his hostility toward his wife as she approached. "Up so early, my dear?" he asked. "I assume then that your cult held a rather short meeting last evening? Which god have you been worshiping recently, by the way? I can never remember his name—"

"Gaius," his wife said, her voice shaking and frail as she leaned against a pillar for support, "a dream . . . I had a dream . . ."

"Oh, of that I have no doubt," Pilate said, "Poppies again, my sweet? I have told you before, Claudia, to keep to refreshments made from grapes."

Claudia Procula, wife of Gaius Pontius Pilate and grandniece of the Emperor Tiberius, shook her head. "Gaius, listen to me . . ."

"Some Parthian god, isn't it?" he asked casually, taking another drink. "Azerius, Azorius, something like that?"

"Ahura," she said weakly. "The god Ahura Mazda. Zoroaster's god. The great god." She paused. "The only god."

"Ah, yes, the only god," he said, smiling wickedly at Strabo. "There seem to be a great many 'only gods' in this part of the world."

"Gaius, please," she said, beginning to weep, "I was warned in a dream, warned about this Yeshua. He is the *Saoshyant,* the chosen one of Ahura Mazda. Let him go, Gaius, free him. If you kill him . . . if you kill him . . ."

"If I kill him, there will be one less Jew to cause trouble for us." He took yet another drink. "I sometimes think that we would be well-advised to kill all of them and get it over with." Strabo did not take these last words seriously. He knew that Pilate respected the rule of law like all good Romans; still, Strabo thought, a world without Jews was an attractive idea.

"Gaius," Claudia pleaded, "I am begging you—you must release him, you must!"

Pilate sat back in his chair and appraised his wife. "In exchange for what, Claudia? Caiaphas doesn't come out and say it, but he is offering me a quiescent, obedient city if I agree to kill this man

who so openly condemns the corruption in this temple of theirs. What do you offer me if I spare him?"

She frowned. "Wh-what are you saying?"

"It is very simple, my dear." Pilate smiled. "I married you because I had hoped that such a union would help me, give me power and wealth and influence. It has done none of those things, and I wish to be rid of you, I wish to be able to make a more useful connection."

The look on Claudia's face shifted from confusion to anger. "Divorce me? You wouldn't dare!"

"No, of course I wouldn't," Pilate agreed. "In favor or out, the emperor's grandniece is still the emperor's grandniece, and I doubt that Tiberius would appreciate it were I to throw you out." He leaned forward. "But if I were to accuse you of sedition, accuse you of conspiring against Rome with these Parthian religious fanatics, these Zoroastrians of yours—Parthia *is* an enemy of Rome, after all—and if you would be inclined not to contest the accusation, I would be able to behead you, be rid of you, and earn the emperor's gratitude at the same time."

She stared at him with shock and disbelief. "You must be mad!"

"No." He shook his head calmly. "All I am saying is that if this Yeshua's life is so important to you, I'll give you the opportunity to exchange it for your own." He smiled. "All of these odd eastern religions tell you about a life of reward after death, do they not? Well, my dear Claudia, I am offering you the opportunity to ensure for yourself a place of honor in your—what was his name? . . . Ahura, was it?—in your Ahura's afterlife."

"Don't be ridiculous!" she said angrily.

"You do not accept my proposition, then?"

"Of course not!"

"I'm not speaking in jest, Claudia," Pilate said, staring at her intently. "At this point I don't know if I can save this man's life, and I'm not really inclined to try too hard anyway. But I'll make the effort if it means I'll be able to get rid of you. This is a serious suggestion, my dear wife. Your life for his."

"Absolutely not!" she huffed.

He laughed grimly. "So much for your most recent devotion to your most recent deity." He turned as he saw the guard dragging the prisoner toward him. "Now, get out of here, Claudia, and go

sacrifice a bull or something. I'm busy." He turned away from her and looked at the prisoner. "This is he?" Pilate asked Strabo.

"Yes, my lord," the centurion replied.

"Well, my good fellow . . ." Pilate began, and then frowned as he realized that the prisoner was not even looking at him. The man who stood bound before him was staring intently at Pilate's wife, Claudia, a look on his face of complete and total bewilderment. Pilate glanced at his wife and said, "Claudia, I told you to leave. Now, leave!"

Strabo watched as Claudia Procula turned and stormed angrily back upstairs, and then he laughed. "My lord, I do believe the lady Claudia thought that your suggestion was serious!"

"Don't be too certain that it wasn't," he muttered darkly, and then returned his attention to the prisoner. "I would strongly recommend to you that you gaze upon Roman ladies with a bit less impertinence." He took another drink of wine, draining the flagon, and then he asked, "What is your name?"

The prisoner's attention had been raptly held by the woman who was even now disappearing up the stairs, and he did not respond immediately. After a moment he said, "I . . . I do not know my name."

Pilate looked at Strabo. "What is this man, an idiot?"

"I don't know, my lord," the centurion replied. "All he would tell us is that he is a Chaldean."

"Very well, Chaldean, if you choose to go nameless into your grave, it is all the same to me. I hear that you know the preacher Yeshua of Nazareth. Is this so?"

"Know him?" Chaldaeus asked. "No, I do not know him. I have followed him and watched him and listened to him waiting to see if he would be able to help me. At long last I realized that what he offers is not what I desire, and so I never approached him."

"Indeed," Pilate said, beginning to suspect that this prisoner would be of no use to him. "And what does he offer?"

"Eternal life," Chaldaeus replied simply.

"Eternal life," Pilate echoed with mock pensiveness. "And you do not wish to have eternal life."

"No."

"And what is it you wish to have?"

Chaldaeus sighed. "Death."

Pilate laughed. "Well, I believe that we can accommodate you, Chaldean. Strabo, what was he arrested for?"

"Murder, my lord," the centurion replied, "but might it not be a good idea to question him as to the things he heard the Nazarene say? He told me that he has been following him for a long while."

Pilate turned back to Chaldaeus. "How long have you known . . . I mean, how long have you been observing the Nazarene?"

"Since his birth," Chaldaeus replied.

Pilate repressed a smile, for the prisoner standing before him was quite obviously younger than Yeshua. "Since his birth, you say?" I was right, Pilate thought. He is an idiot.

"Yes," Chaldaeus said. "I was in Chaldea when he was born. There were travelers, men of knowledge and wisdom, whom I met there. They came from a land farther east, and somehow their language seemed familiar to me, so I followed them. They had been vouchsafed a prophecy and were going to pay homage to a deliverer. I desired deliverance, and so I went with them to his birthplace. I bided my time, I waited, and I watched, and—"

"Strabo," Pilate interrupted, "any doubt as to this man's guilt?"

"None, my lord. We found him covered with blood, surrounded by the bodies of his victims."

Pilate nodded. "Do you have anything to say in your defense?" Chaldaeus did not reply, and so Pilate said, "You have been found guilty and have been sentenced to death. Execution of the sentence will be immed . . ." He stopped and thought for a moment. Neither this man's life nor the life of the preacher Yeshua meant anything to Pilate, but he disliked having to give in to the demands of Caiaphas. Then he smiled as an idea occurred to him, an idea which might enable him safely to defy the corrupt but powerful high priest. "Strabo, do you have any idea what his name is?"

"None, my lord."

"Don't these people always identify themselves by giving their fathers' names? I mean, so-and-so, the son of so-and-so?" Pilate looked at Chaldaeus. "What was your father's name, Chaldean?"

The prisoner shrugged. "I do not know my own name. How then should I know my father's name?"

Strabo coughed. "May I ask my lord what he is considering?"

"You know more of the language of these Jews than I do,

Strabo," Pilate said, ignoring the question. "How do you say the word 'father' in their tongue?"

"It is *abba*, my lord," Strabo replied, confused. "But—"

"And *ben* means 'son of,' does it not?"

"In their ancient language," replied the soldier who had brought Chaldaeus into the room, "the language of their priests and books. In the tongue of the mob the word is *bar*."

"Yes, of course." Pilate nodded. "We have Yeshua bar Yoshef outside right now." He leaned forward and smiled at Chaldaeus. "Are you a gambling man, my friend?"

Chaldaeus returned the smile with a sad one of his own. "Fate has not graced me with sufficient fortune for me to have confidence in my luck."

"Well, you are about to become a gambling man, and you had better hope for a lucky roll of the dice, son of your father." Pilate had been conversing in the Greek tongue, that universal medium of communication in the eastern Roman Empire, and spoke these last words in a Hellenized manner. Son of your father, he had called him.

Barabbas.

As Pilate walked back out toward the dais, Strabo turned to the soldier and asked, "How did you know that, about their ancient language and such?"

The soldier shrugged slightly. "I have a woman here from among these people, Centurion."

Strabo nodded as he pulled Chaldaeus out after the procurator. A reasonable explanation. Soldiers are men, no matter where they are stationed.

The mob outside the procurator's residence had diminished neither in number nor in noise, and the din rose even more fiercely when Pilate walked back out into view. He allowed them to scream for a few moments and then slowly raised his hand to command silence. At a subtle gesture from the high priest Caiaphas, the screaming subsided. "You have a custom, I believe," Pilate said loudly, "that on this, your most holy day, your Passover, your ruler release to you one prisoner who has been condemned to death."

The prisoner called Chaldaeus or Barabbas or any of a dozen other names was not listening as the procurator offered the mob a choice between his life and the life of Yeshua the Nazarene. At

the moment Pilate began speaking, Yeshua turned his head toward his fellow prisoner and captured Chaldaeus' attention with his gaze. Chaldaeus stared deeply into Yeshua's eyes, and those eyes were fathomless and sorrowful, filled with understanding and love. Chaldaeus began to shiver as he felt wave after wave of boundless pity wash over him, and the waves of pity seemed to envelop his very being. They seemed to roll out from Yeshua's eyes as if they were the ocean of infinity itself. Yeshua continued to look at Chaldaeus. No word was spoken, no gesture made, but Chaldaeus realized instinctively the significance of that look.

He knows! He knows! The Nazarene knows, he understands! He can help me! He can help me!

"Not this man, but Barabbas!" the voice of Caiaphas boomed out, breaking into Chaldaeus' thoughts.

"Barabbas! Barabbas!" was the frenzied refrain of the mob. "Give us Barabbas!"

They are going to kill him! Chaldaeus thought madly. If he dies, I am lost, I am lost!

"I am the guilty one, not Yeshua!" Chaldaeus screamed. "Kill me, not him! Me, not him! I am a murderer, a murderer! Kill me, not him! He is guilty of nothing! I am guilty!" But his voice was drowned out by the screams of the mob, which was determined to free him from the death he could not suffer so that they might send to the place of execution the man who was his only chance to die.

"But what of Yeshua?" Pilate asked, shouting to be heard.

"Crucify him!" Caiaphas cried, and the mob took up the words as a chant, repeating them over and over in a deafening rhythm.

Strabo cut the leather thong which bound the hands of Chaldaeus together, and then the centurion pushed him from the dais into the hands of the crowd below, who largely ignored him. And as the rest of the drama of that black Friday was played out in the courtyard and on the execution hill of Golgotha, Chaldaeus was an impotent spectator. Yeshua bar Yoshef, the preacher from Nazareth, was crucified, died, and was buried.

And when that day ended and the setting sun gave way to the rising moon, a werewolf crept through the streets of Jerusalem toward the residence of the procurator, its subhuman mind obsessed by a drive which was new to it, which it could neither understand nor control.

It was seeking the woman, seeking the one whose face had been emblazoned on the mind of its human self earlier that day. The werewolf did not remember seeing Claudia Procula, it did not remember its human self, it had no memories of anything other than the moon and the hunt and the taste of human flesh; but something was different on this night, something had happened, and it was as if the creature felt an itch it could not scratch, an irritation, an urge, and it sought out the woman without rational thought, for it was incapable of rational thought, knowing neither whither it went nor why.

The werewolf climbed up the southern wall of the residence of Pontius Pilate and his wife, Claudia. It ignored its hunger, it did not pounce upon the guards. It crept in silence, a consummate hunter, through the corridors of the residence, until it found the woman.

She was lying in a deep sleep on a large soft bed swathed in fine, almost transparent linen. The werewolf moved closer and gazed down at her for a moment. It did not remember the shock its human self had suffered when he first saw the woman, but that which had caused the prisoner Chaldaeus to stare at Claudia Procula so intently was the same thing which even now told the werewolf that it had found the object of its search. On her forehead, glowing red in the darkness, invisible to all the world save to the eyes of the beast, was a circle of blood-red light within which rested a pentagram, a five-pointed star.

The creature ripped away the linen and attacked, but it did not kill. It only bit, and in its bite was damnation.

It was to be years, centuries, before Claudia Procula became the companion of Chaldaeus, before the terror of what he had done to her and the unspeakable horror of what he had caused her to become was overpowered by her need to be with someone and her desperate drive to know and to understand. She fled from him and he followed her, from Jerusalem to Syria, from Athens to Egypt, from Byzantium to Rome; and though she sought to escape from the presence of the sad-eyed, tragic young man, she awoke in his company on the morning after each full moon, for when the power of the beast rose in her, she sought him out and feasted alongside him upon the flesh of the innocents, bound to him in a perverse eucharist of blood.

Eventually she accepted his presence, and eventually she came to cling to him with the same pathetic loneliness with which he clung to her. He was, she told him, like the Roman god of the doorway, the god Ianus, with two faces, one looking out and one looking in; but for Ianus Chaldaeus, Janus Chaldian, Janos Kaldy, one face was the face of endless sorrow and the other the face of eternal death. . . .

Neville's face was flushed with anger as he shook Kaldy roughly. "Wake up, Kaldy!" he barked.

Kaldy opened his eyes and gazed up at the minister, though he seemed to be looking through him. "So that was what happened," he whispered. "She always said that she had a memory, a dim recollection. She always believed that somehow I was responsible for making her what she is."

Neville had been sitting on the cold stone floor beside Kaldy, staring at him angrily. As he rose stiffly to his feet, he said, "A very interesting coincidence, don't you think?"

"Coincidence?" Kaldy asked innocently.

"Yes, that just after I start talking about Zoroaster and Ahura Mazda, you come up with a memory that includes the worship of Ahura Mazda and connects him with Christ?"

Kaldy did not frown, but his voice was cold and steady as he responded, "I'm not entirely certain what you mean, Doctor."

"Oh, it's quite obvious, I think," Neville snapped. "Bracher was right. You've been lying to me, you've been making this whole thing up." He laughed bitterly. "So you were Barabbas, and your friend Claudia was Pontius Pilate's wife, and she was a Zoroastrian! How fascinating, and how convenient!"

Kaldy sat up and drew his knees up to his chest, wrapping his thin arms around them. "I don't propose to debate with you, Doctor. What I remember is what I remember." He frowned and looked down pensively. "But why did I see the pentagram on her forehead? Why did I wound her and not kill her?" He shook his head. "I don't understand. I don't understand at all."

"Well, I understand," Neville said. "You've put my life in danger, and you've put my wife's life in danger."

Louisa, who had been listening silently from the moment that the regression had begun, spoke up. "Don't be absurd, John,"

she said, her voice trembling with the tears she was struggling to repress. "It isn't Mr. Kaldy's fault that we've been kidnapped by maniacs."

Neville turned to his wife and shouted, "Louisa, how in God's name can you defend this man? He's been laughing behind our backs from the first day! He can't die, he can't be killed, so he has nothing to risk, nothing to lose! He's been playing with us, amusing himself at our expense! And now what am I supposed to tell Frederick? Am I seriously expected to tell him this . . . this . . . *fable*?"

"Tell him whatever you want!" Louisa shouted back, weeping. "I think I'm beginning to prefer death to this satire of life! My marriage is a farce, my country is being threatened by barbarians, my husband is a spineless clown, and my own cousin . . . my own cousin . . ." Her voice broke. "So tell Frederick whatever you want, and let him murder us now, like he has murdered so many others, like he's probably going to murder us anyway!"

Neville began to respond when he heard the sound of a key turning in the lock of the cell door. A guard pushed the door open and Petra Loewenstein slowly entered the cell. She fixed her eyes on Kaldy and did not look away from him as she said softly to Neville. "The formula works. The captain sent me to fetch you. The program goes into effect tonight."

"Tonight!" he exclaimed. "Doesn't he want to wait another three days? Tomorrow night is the full moon!"

"Tonight," she repeated. "He wants you immediately. Don't keep him waiting."

"No, no, of course not," he muttered distractedly as he walked toward the cell door. "But what am I going to tell him? What on earth am I going to . . . ?" He stopped and looked at her. "Petra, you're in the same room with Kaldy and you aren't wearing your surgical mask!"

"No," she agreed, never taking her eyes off the young ancient. "I'm not."

Neville nodded. "I suppose you've finally realized that there's no danger of infection."

"I suppose so," she said in a deadly monotone.

"Yes . . . yes, well . . ." Neville had nothing further to say, and so he left the cell. The guard closed the door behind him but did not lock it, knowing that Petra would herself be leaving shortly.

Louisa stepped forward and stood before Petra. "Did you hear any of what Mr. Kaldy just told us?"

"I heard," she replied softly, still staring at Kaldy. "I've been standing outside the cell for a long while. I heard everything."

"But you don't agree with John, do you?" Louisa asked, eager to have her husband contradicted, needing to hear Petra say that it was all true, that Kaldy was not lying. "It isn't all a fabrication! It simply can't be all a fabrication!"

Petra ignored Louisa, moving around her and walking over to Kaldy. She looked down at him silently for a few moments and then her face grew suddenly red with anger. "So it *was* you, Janos. I was right. It was you all along!"

Kaldy smiled up at her warmly. "Hello, Claudia," he said.

III

THE BRIDGE OF THE SEPARATOR

Du muss herrschen und gewinnen
oder dienen und verlieren,
leiden oder triumphieren,
Amboss oder Hammer sein.

(You must rule and win
or serve and lose,
suffer or triumph,
be anvil or hammer.)

—GOETHE

16

"A little exercise" and an oblique reference to the possibility of another autopsy was all Bracher would say in response to Neville's inquiry. The captain had not been in his office when Neville arrived, but the two whips who had been waiting for the minister had been left quite specific orders, orders that caused Neville to feel a sourness in the pit of his stomach and a numbing weakness in his knees.

They had been ordered to see to his transportation from the Hulltech Center to the training compound near Red Creek, a town some fifty miles from Mannering and less than thirty miles from the border of Canada. But what had upset the minister was neither the distance nor the late hour. What had caused him such fear was the fact that as they drove through the dark countryside into the rural vastness of North Dakota, one of the whips told him that the training compound was really more than a training compound, that it was designed to be the first of many relocation centers that would be constructed and put into operation once the White Homeland Party had taken over the country. Neville was an educated man, and he had read enough history to recognize the term. The Germans had used the term decades before. A "relocation center" in Nazi parlance was a concentration camp, which was to say a city of death; and Neville kept reviewing Bracher's ominous warning in his mind as he sat in the back of the automobile taking him there.

As the car pulled to a halt in front of the administration building and Neville stepped out into the cool evening air, he felt a surge of panic. But Bracher had greeted him cheerfully, perhaps a bit too cheerfully, when he was ushered into the captain's presence in the main office of the administration building, and he had been

partly but not totally relieved when Bracher made his cryptic comments about an exercise and autopsies.

"Frederick," Neville asked, "Miss Loewenstein said that the experiment was a success. So why will you need any more autopsies? I'm afraid I don't quite follow you."

"You don't follow me because I haven't really told you anything yet, old boy," Bracher grinned, his tone of voice terrifying in its cruel conviviality as he set about removing his business suit and began to don camouflage fatigues. "Here, put this on," he said, taking a pile of neatly folded white cloths from a shelf behind the desk and tossing them to Neville, who, not having been prepared to catch the apparel, dropped it all to the floor. "You'll need it for your part in tonight's little exercise."

"My . . . my part? Frederick, what are you talking about?" Neville unfolded the cloth as he spoke, and his eyes went wide when he realized that it consisted of a gown and hood sewn from embroidered white sheets. "This . . . this is a . . . a . . ."

"Yes, a Klan uniform." Bracher smiled. "More than just a Klan uniform. This, my friend, is the uniform of a Grand Imperial Wizard, a very high-ranking Klansman. Interesting people, the Ku Klux Klan. A little slow, most of them, but some have interesting insights."

Neville gazed at the white clothing nervously. "Uh, Frederick, I, uh, I really don't want to, uh . . ."

Bracher walked over to Neville and grabbed him roughly by the lapels of his black coat. "Now, my dear old friend, listen to me. You're going to do whatever I tell you to do. You will follow my orders without question or debate. Do you understand?" Bracher's face was not four inches from Neville's as he made this quiet yet chillingly threatening statement, and his ice-cold blue eyes were boring their way into Neville's. The minister nodded a rapid assent. Bracher smiled and added, "Of course, if you feel so strongly about this, you can explain your feelings to my boys outside and let them decide. How about it, John?"

"Oh, n-no, Frederick, no, I'll . . . I'll help out" Neville muttered.

"Smart fellow," Bracher said amicably. "We've always gotten along rather well, John. I'd hate for anything to come between us now."

Not believing for an instant that Bracher had any warm feelings for him whatsoever, the minister asked, "Well, neither would I, neither would I. But what are we doing here, Frederick?"

Bracher looked down at the sheets. "I'll tell you as you're getting dressed." As Neville proceeded to don the white garb of the Ku Klux Klan, Bracher asked, "How much did Petra tell you?"

"Next to nothing," he replied. "All she told me was that the experiment had succeeded."

"Well, let me give you the details," he said, sitting down in a chair and pulling on his combat boots. "She injected a gook with the solution, and it didn't kill him." He paused. "The gook seemed to experience some discomfort, but that's beside the point. We waited for a few minutes, to make certain that the solution had been . . . metabolized . . . and then emptied a machine gun into him, not once, but three times." He paused and leaned toward Neville as if to emphasize the significance of his words. "Three times, John. That's ninety bullets at close range."

Neville swallowed hard. "And he wasn't injured?"

"Oh, the gook died." Bracher smiled. "But the point is that we had to shoot him ninety times to kill him! That's enough invulnerability for our purposes, don't you think?"

Neville nodded. "It certainly is impressive." He paused for a moment after pulling the gown over his head, and then, as he fingered the hood nervously, he asked, "I'd really like to know . . . I mean, why am I . . . what are we doing tonight?"

"It's a very simple plan, John," Bracher said calmly. "Once the formula and the procedure were demonstrated to be effective, it was relatively simple for Petra to produce a large quantity of it for tonight's stage in the experiment. She mixed the solution after . . ." He paused. "Well, after we conducted the successful experiment. We have fifteen volunteers from my eager little group of whips, we have the solution with which to alter them as we desire . . ." He smiled again. "And we have a training camp of the Maccabees in the hills near here to serve as the focal point of this stage of our procedure. Do you know who the Maccabees are?"

"Well, of course I know who the Maccabees were in intertestamental times, but—"

"No, no," Bracher interrupted, something of his customary impatience breaking through the veneer of comradely warmth, "not the ancient ones. The Jewish group in America today."

Neville shook his head. "No, I don't think so."

"They're a militarist group," Bracher explained. "A bunch of Zionists who say they're ready and willing to fight and die to protect the Jews from persecution." He laughed. "As if they needed to do that in a country where the Jews control the television networks and the newspapers and the stock exchange and the banks."

Neville finally understood. "You are going to have your men —your altered men, that is—fight these Jewish militants?"

"Precisely," Bracher replied. "Once my boys have been treated and we're certain that the chemical has been absorbed and the bone marrow is producing genetically altered blood, we'll go into the hills and flush out the yids." He smiled. "We'll test our new race of soldiers under combat conditions."

Neville nodded. "I see, I see. But how will you, ah, flush the, ah, yids out, Frederick?"

"By giving them something they'd like to capture or kill, of course." Bracher smiled. "Just like staking out a prey animal, John. Remember how we captured Kaldy, by staking out his Gypsy friend? Well, we're doing something very similar tonight."

In an instant the minister understood why he was wearing the clothing of an Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, and his knees began to wobble. "But . . . but . . ."

"Don't be frightened," Bracher said amicably. "If all goes well, the Jews won't get close enough to you to pinch your cheek!"

"If all goes well!" he cried. "If all goes well! Frederick, I might be killed!"

"Yes, but this is war, John! Men die in battle all the time. Do you have any idea how many good Confederate soldiers died at Gettysburg, how many loyal Germans died at Stalingrad?"

"Yes, but—"

"The idea, you see, is very simple. We're going to drive to a clearing near the Jews' camp and set up a wooden cross. When we set fire to it, the Jews'll come running like maggots to rotten meat. We'll have you standing there in your Wizard's robe, with my fifteen—what shall we call them . . . how about lycanvolk? . . . that has a nice Germanic ring to it—with my fifteen lycanvolk

with you, all dressed like Klansmen." He laughed softly. "Some of them are Klansmen. Anyway, I'll be watching through binoculars from a safe distance." Bracher stood up and straightened his thick belt. "The Maccabees will show up soon enough after we light the cross, and then, when they attack, we'll see how my men perform in combat."

"But, F-Frederick," he stammered, "perhaps it w-would be better t-to wait—"

"Nonsense, John, nonsense," he said, trying not to laugh as he wagged his finger at Neville and added sententiously, "Procrastination is the first rung on the ladder of failure."

"But why me?" he whined. "Why not . . . why not have one of your own people, someone treated with the solution—"

"Why don't I just have a whip dress up like a Grand Imperial Wizard?" he finished for him. "Let me explain it to you, John, and let me begin my explanation by asking you what else you've been told by the Gypsy Kaldy." He paused, awaiting a reply. "Well?"

"Ah . . . well, he, ah . . ."

"Told you more of his fairy tales?" Bracher suggested.

"Well, yes, as a matter of fact . . ."

"Whose company did he find himself in this time? President Washington and Oliver Cromwell? Buddha and Confucius? Hitler and Stalin? Or was he a drinking buddy of Alexander the Great?"

Oh, Lord, Neville moaned inwardly. "No, Frederick, he talked about . . . well, about Pontius Pilate and Jesus Christ and the crucifixion."

"No kidding!" Bracher replied, feigning surprise. "He was Christ, I assume, and the Romans were unable to drive the nails into his hands?"

Neville wiped his brow with a shaking hand. "No, he, ah, he was Barabbas."

"Barabbas! Of course. I should have guessed. And his mysterious friend Claudia was Mary Magdalene, I suppose?"

Neville sighed. "No, she was Pilate's wife."

"Pilate's wife." Bracher nodded. "Yes, that makes sense, of course." He looked at Neville, all trace of amusement vanishing from his eyes. "Do you understand now why I want you to play a part in tonight's mission?"

"Frederick, I—"

"You're a disgrace, John, a disgrace to your family and a disgrace to your race," he said darkly. "It's my misfortune to be related to you by marriage, and it's almost an act of self-purification for me to make certain that you render some service to our cause, even if it means setting you up as a clay pigeon."

"Frederick, please . . ." he wept.

"You're a weakling, John, a simpering, cowardly weakling. You disgust me, you nauseate me. At least Louisa has the courage to speak her mind—courage seems to be a family characteristic—but you! You lick the ass of anyone who chooses to shit in your face!"

"Frederick, I'll do anything you want me to do, I swear—"

"Of course you will," he said. "You'll do anything that *anyone* wants you to do, you insect. When this is all over, when I'm certain that our invulnerable soldiers can function effectively, I intend to have your annoying wife and her Gypsy friends liquidated." He paused. "Well, Blasko, at least, and then Kaldy, once Petra or Raymore figures out how to do it. Louisa will be killed anyway, but at least she'll die on her feet, a brave if misguided white woman. You, on the other hand, just may survive this night, and if so, and if any of my men are killed. I'll expect you to perform the autopsies. But if none of my men are killed or injured, then I'm afraid that you, our esteemed ordained servant of the Lord, had best prepare to meet Him."

"But I'm sure . . . I'm sure . . . I . . . I mean, I know I can continue to be of help . . . I mean, the project . . . the project—"

"Continue to be of help!" Bracher exclaimed, laughing coldly. "What the hell makes you think that you've been of *any* help? Oh, sure, you autopsied the dead experimental animals, but that's hardly what I'd call a vital contribution to the project." He shook his head. "No, John, you've spent the past month doing two things. You have allowed a subhuman freak to humiliate us all by spinning his fancies off as truth, and you've gotten on my nerves. I think that we can dispense with both of your services in short order, don't you?"

"Frederick, for the love of God . . ."

Bracher laughed. "Haven't you read your Nietzsche lately, John? God is dead. Now all things are possible." His laughter ceased abruptly. "Take that hood and come with me."

On trembling legs, Neville followed behind Bracher, out of the building into the darkness. Bracher glanced up at the moon, whose

face was almost but not entirely full. Tomorrow night, he thought, my men will need to be confined; but tonight they will be human, rational, and impervious to the guns of the Jews.

"I wonder what the full moon has to do with it, anyway," Bracher mused aloud.

"Wh-what?" Neville asked.

"Nothing, nothing, John," he snapped. "I wasn't talking to you. Just keep quiet and come with me." He glanced at the shaking man beside him. "And try to steady your hands. You have to inject my boys, and I want it done properly. It may be your last opportunity to do something right, so don't screw it up."

Bracher led Neville through the door of what appeared to be a barracks. Within, Corporal Briggs was standing in front of a line of whips, and he and they snapped to attention when Bracher entered. The building, like all the buildings in the camp, was a sturdy wooden structure, but this one had evidently been neither used nor occupied until that night. No beds lined the walls, no chairs stood near the doors or windows, the open lockers were empty, and one solitary table provided the only furnishing in the large high-ceilinged room.

Bracher gestured brusquely at the table and said, "The solution and the syringes are over there. Get them ready." As Neville walked numbly toward the table, Bracher turned to Briggs and asked, "Have you briefed them?"

"Yeah, Captain," Briggs replied. "I told them everything."

"Good," he muttered, and then frowned. "There are only fourteen, Briggs. I wanted fifteen."

"I'm the fifteenth, sir," Briggs said. "If that's okay."

Bracher appraised him. "You know how much this is going to hurt, Briggs . . ."

"Yes, Captain," his aide replied, "and I also know what kind of power I'll end up with. Remember, I almost got killed by one of those things. I know how powerful they are, and I want that power!"

Bracher smiled and nodded, and then turned to the fourteen other whips who stood stiffly before him, only their eyes giving expression to their eager yet nervous excitement, tinged with just a hint of skepticism. He looked each one in the face for a moment and then said, "Men, you have volunteered for what may well be the single most important experiment in our entire

scientific program. When volunteers were first called for, all you knew was that we needed test subjects for an experimental chemical which, we hoped, would increase the effectiveness and fighting power of our future army." He paused and smiled. "If it is possible to increase something as formidable as you men already are."

The whips glanced at each other, smiling and laughing softly at their commander's words. Bracher knew that they were all nervous and he also knew that allowing them a few moments during which they could look at each other and share a bit of trivial mirth would serve to ease their tension. He waited until the muted laughter had subsided, and then he continued. "Until tonight, none of you knew the details of the experiment, and I assume that now that you have had it all explained to you, there are some of you who are experiencing a healthy skepticism." He paused. "But let me assure you that it's all completely true. I've seen this creature with my own eyes. I've seen it change its form from that of a man into that of a beast, and I know for a fact that regardless of the form it happens to be in, it can't be injured or killed." He paused again, allowing them to absorb his words. "I also know for a fact, on the basis of my own personal observation, that a large degree of invulnerability results from the absorption of the enzyme discovered in the creature's blood. Don't misunderstand me; a human being injected with this solution can indeed be killed. But Corporal Briggs has read the report to you. Ninety rounds at close range, gentlemen. Ninety rounds were needed to effect death." He smiled at them and moved his eyes from face to face. "Good enough, isn't it?"

He paused again as the smiles and soft laughs rose and then dissipated. "I won't insult you young men by minimizing what this will mean, and anyone who wants to change his mind about participating is free to leave right now. Remember what you've been told. The injection we're going to give you will hurt like hell. And we're almost certain that for two nights out of each month, when this change occurs, it will be necessary to restrain you. But at all other times, on the other hand, you will be immune to disease, not subject to injury, not needing sleep or food, free from thirst and hunger and fatigue and pain. And we can also assume that your lifespan will be increased considerably." He

looked again from face to face. "You have the facts, gentlemen. Does anyone wish to leave?"

Not one hand shot up, not one voice was raised. "Good boys," Bracher said, and then asked Neville, "Are you ready, John?"

"Y-y-yes . . ." he tried to reply.

"Good." Bracher turned back to his men. "I call for a volunteer from among you volunteers, to receive the first injection." He smiled, almost thrilled with pride as each and every one of the fifteen whips stepped forward. "Men, the future histories of this great struggle of ours will record your names and proclaim your courage," he whispered. He looked at Briggs and said, "You be the trailblazer, Dwayne."

"Sure, Captain," the young man replied, his eyes gleaming with eagerness. "And thank you, Captain."

Bracher nodded an acceptance of the thanks, then barked at Neville, "Go ahead!"

Neville, who had been breathing deeply in an attempt to calm himself, walked over to Briggs, who removed his coat and lowered his trousers promptly, without being instructed to do so. Neville shook his head. "I'm sorry, but you know that this will hurt. You might ask a couple of your friends to hold you down."

Briggs snorted disdainfully. "Just do it, man."

Neville wiped his brow. "Lie down on your side, at least. And try not to move. I don't want to break the needle." Briggs complied, shooting a smile of bravado to his friends. Neville then affixed a shield to the end of the syringe and took the small hammer from the table. Sighing again and trying to keep from shaking, he proceeded to pound the long, thick needle into the young man's pelvic bone. Briggs's eyes bulged and his mouth opened wide as his entire frame began to shudder violently. A scream struggled to escape from his lips, and every muscle in his body felt as if it were being ripped apart as the excruciating pain exploded in his pelvis. But his friends were watching him, and he willed himself not to let them see him scream. He fought, fought his own need to pull away from the agonizing needle, fought to maintain his dignity and his self-mastery in the presence of his leader and his friends. He was not equal to the struggle, and a long ear-piercing shriek burst from his lips a moment before he passed out. A few long minutes passed, and by the time Briggs drifted back to con-

sciousness the pain had begun to diminish. In another minute it had receded to a dull, throbbing ache, and Briggs released a relieved sigh.

"How do you feel, Briggs?" Bracher asked.

"I'm . . . I'm fine, Captain," he replied, his voice shaking slightly.

"Good, good." Bracher smiled. "And now we wait. Your bones are already beginning to generate a new type of blood, and that blood is going to change every cell in your body. In an hour, Briggs, you'll be the first of our new warrior caste." He smiled. "The first of our new race of supermen."

The time seemed to drag on slowly, and the whips smoked cigarettes and talked with each other as Bracher paced back and forth, glancing occasionally at his watch. Neville stood against the wall, silent but for his heavy breathing and motionless but for his shaking hands.

At last Bracher said, "Time enough. Briggs, stand over there against that wall." Briggs, puzzled, complied. Bracher turned to the fourteen other whips and said, "Draw your sidearms, gentlemen. At my command, you will open fire on Briggs, and will continue firing until your pistols are empty." The fourteen men looked at each other hesitantly, and Briggs, standing stiffly against the wall, swallowed almost audibly. "Any questions?" Bracher asked. There were none. "Good. Draw your sidearms."

Fourteen pistols were drawn.

"Ready . . ." Bracher said. "Aim . . . commence firing."

Neville cringed at the gunfire. The barren openness of the large empty room seemed to intensify the deafening sound of the barrage, and in an instant the barracks was filled with thin, acrid smoke. Neville had shut his eyes tightly when the firing began, and when he opened them he saw Briggs still standing against the wall, laughing with relief, to all appearances completely uninjured.

Bracher walked over to the young man and wrapped his arms around him in an oddly paternal gesture. "Well done, Briggs, well done." He smiled. He turned to the other soldiers. "Seeing is believing, isn't it, boys?"

The whips broke into a spontaneous round of applause, and then lined up by the table, removing their coats and lowering their trousers, one by one lying down on their sides.

Three hours later, Neville was standing beside the limousine,

dripping with fear-induced sweat. Each inch of the ride through the hilly countryside of western North Dakota in the direction of the Canadian border had served as a progression marker to increase his fear. He stood now and searched the surrounding darkness for movement while the large wooden cross was erected by the young whips . . . the lycanvolk, the manufactured werewolves, the first generation of Bracher's conquering army. Neville prayed in silent, terrified desperation, unable to rid himself of the gnawing suspicion that his prayer was being ignored.

All was as Bracher had indicated it would be. The captain was out there in the darkness somewhere, watching and waiting. The troop truck in which the whips had themselves made the journey rested by the roadside some ten yards behind the staff car. The smell of gasoline reached Neville's nostrils as the cross was bathed in the flammable liquid, and when the match was tossed and the cross burst into billowing flames, Neville listened to his heart race and felt his body tremble as his lips moved in incessant, frightened prayer.

A half-hour passed in nervous silence. And then, suddenly and without warning, the clearing was alive with the chaos of battle as the Jewish paramilitary group opened fire. They streamed from the surrounding forest, their guns blazing away in their hands as they attacked the supposedly surprised Klansmen.

Neville closed his eyes, not knowing if he should pray for the Maccabees or the lycanvolk. The success of either meant certain death for him, and so it was for himself that he prayed.

The battle was a short one. The Maccabees exhausted their ammunition quickly, firing a sufficient number of rounds to have killed a hundred men; but not one of Bracher's lycanvolk race fell to the ground, not one drop of their blood dripped onto the road, not one of their lives met its end at the hands of the attackers. Instead the Maccabees themselves were killed, most by the returned fire, and a few, those who were bold enough to rush at the car, by the bare hands of the superhuman, or perhaps merely inhuman, whips.

The time between the first gunshot and the last had been no more than fifteen minutes, and another fifteen minutes elapsed before Frederick Bracher emerged from the forest that bordered the road. "Gentlemen," he called out as he stepped onto the road, "I congratulate you!" He had spoken both to express his satis-

faction and to alert his men of his approach, so that the sound would not lead one of them to fire at him. "We'll celebrate this victory in proper style when we get back to the compound." Bracher climbed into the rear seat of the limousine and indicated with a curt gesture that Neville was to join him. He ignored the minister as Briggs started the engine and began to drive back toward the compound. He said not one word to his wife's cousin, and Neville made no attempt at conversation either. He was nursing the irrational hope that Bracher might forget about him entirely.

As they drew near to the compound, Bracher turned to him and asked, "Have you ever read *Mein Kampf*, John?"

"Oh, yes, of course I have," he lied nervously.

"The new order," Bracher whispered distantly, turning to gaze out into the darkness. "That's what Hitler wrote about, what he tried to make a reality, what the white race has been yearning for since the turn of the century, John, without even realizing it. That's what we're working for now." He sighed with weary contentment. "Tonight we've created a weapon the likes of which this planet has never seen, and with this weapon we'll reorganize human society the way that God intended it to be."

Neville nodded a simpering agreement. "Yes, yes," he muttered.

Bracher turned to Neville and smiled amicably. "You see, John, by 1914 most of the world was under white rule. Whites had colonized the Americas and Australia and New Zealand. Almost all of Africa was under European colonial rule, and so was most of Asia, directly or indirectly. The white world itself was majestic in its purity."

"Uh . . . yes, yes . . . m-majestic."

"Think about it. What was North America in 1914? A white Anglo-Saxon republic here, an Anglo-French dominion of Britain to the north, and a virtual colony of ours stretching south all the way to Colombia. And South America itself was a continent of black and red half-breeds ruled by a white aristocracy." Bracher was speaking softly in distant tones, as if he were conjuring up images of a long-lost Eden, idyllic and tranquil. "In Europe, ancient dynasties presiding over ancient cultures, the Hapsburgs, the Hohenzollerns, the Braganzas, the Bernadottes in Sweden, the Savoyards in Italy, the Bourbons in Spain. And the Romanovs too, keeping absolute rule over their disgusting population of

Asiatic mongrels." He sighed. "And what's happened since 1914? Jews and Mongols running Russia. America, France, and Britain duped into destroying Germany. Blacks demanding to be treated like whites. Orientals dominating banks and stock exchanges. Jews pissing on our Constitution right and left. Communists in Eastern Europe."

"Y-yes, yes . . ." Neville stammered. "It's, uh . . . it's very unfortunate." Don't kill me, please don't kill me . . . oh, God, don't let him kill me.

"It's more than unfortunate, John," Bracher said sadly. "Left unchecked, it could be fatal. We have spicks poisoning our kids with drugs, blacks sucking money out of us like vampires, peaceniks trying to blind us to the Communist threat, Japs and Chinks and Arabs taking over our economy, and all of them doing it with the help of the Jewish courts and TV networks and newspapers. And worst of all, its all being done under the noses of those white puppets, those white-race traitors who think that they're running the government." Bracher's face grew hard. "But we'll stop them, goddamm it!"

"Of course . . . of course . . ."

He looked at Neville. "Do you want to know what the world will be like in a hundred years, John?"

"Yes, of course." Let me be alive tomorrow, he prayed, let me be alive next week, next year . . .

"The inferior races, the polluters of the human strain, will all have been done away with," Bracher said. "Think about it, John. Isn't the idea glorious?"

"Gl-glorious, Frederick."

"Once we've created an army of these lycanvolk, we'll be able to take over the country in a matter of months. We're already working out the tactics of it. No need for outright conquest. Key centers taken over, and so forth."

"Oh, yes, yes."

"Hitler's mistake, you see, was in failing to realize that whites are whites are whites, except for the Jews, of course. Slavs, Celts, Iberians, Latins, they're all really whites, and they'll all be our allies once we get into gear. Oh, we'll have to weed out the Mongol elements in some of the Slavs, weed out the redskin and nigger blood in most of the Latin Americans . . . except the Argentines, of course."

"Of course."

"We'll have to use every scientific tool at our disposal to get rid of the impurities," Bracher mused, "but we'll do it. It's just a matter of time."

"All a matter of time, yes indeed."

Bracher grinned. "A century from now, two centuries at most, this will be a planet ruled by a white master race, served by slaves and living in perfect order beneath a planetary government run by the White Homeland Party. And if technology advances far enough to satisfy whatever needs now depend upon manual labor, we'll even be able to wipe out the slaves." He sighed. "Utopia. That's what this movement is all about, John. Utopia."

Bracher fell into a contemplative silence as the gates of the compound swung open and they drove into the courtyard. He smiled at Neville and said, "Now I have to call the Center and have fourteen prisoners sent over. We'll be needing them for tomorrow night."

"More . . . more prisoners?" Neville asked, trying to sound casual, trying to sound as if he and Bracher were still somehow allied in the project. "Another round of experiments?"

"Oh, no, the experimental phase is over and done with. But we know that Kaldy doesn't eat anything until he's transformed, and that when that happens he seeks out human flesh. I have to assume that my men will have the same needs, and I don't want to deprive them of whatever nourishment they need." He opened the door of the staff car. "No, now our prisoners will serve as food."

Neville shuddered at the unspeakable idea. "But, Frederick, can't they eat beef or some other kind of meat? It certainly can't be necessary to—"

"John," Bracher said sadly but without anger, "you're a sentimental fool. These prisoners are destined for death in experiments at Hulltech anyway. What difference does it make how they die, as long as they serve a useful purpose in their deaths?"

Neville wiped his brow with his shaking hand and then frowned. "But why fourteen prisoners, Frederick? You have fifteen men!"

Bracher smiled at him cruelly. "Very good, John, very good! You can count!"

Neville's look of confusion collapsed into one of unmitigated horror as he realized what Bracher was saying. "Fred-

erick . . . Frederick, you wouldn't . . . you can't mean . . . you wouldn't . . .!''

''You should feel honored, my dear pastor,'' Bracher said as he stepped from the car. ''This is as close as a Christian can come in this century to being thrown to the lions.'' He looked at the whips who had left the truck and were walking toward him, and then he pointed at Neville. ''Lock him up,'' he ordered, and then walked toward the administration building, listening with cheerful contentment to Neville's frenzied screams as he pleaded and implored and begged for mercy, screams which faded into silence as the minister was dragged away by Bracher's men. Briggs fell into place beside his commander and Bracher said, ''I want you to go to Mannering at once and call Hull in California on the phone, the new one in my office with the electronic scrambling device. I don't trust this message to the phones we have here at the compound.''

''At once, Captain,'' Briggs replied. ''What should I tell Mr. Hull?''

Bracher thought for a moment. ''Ask him on my behalf to come here as soon as he can. Tell him the Lycanthropos Project has been completed and the experiment is a success. Tell him . . .'' The bright moonlight reflected madly in his blue eyes as he smiled and whispered, as much to himself as to Briggs, ''Tell him that we have won the war.''

17

Louisa Neville stood in the middle of the dank cell, her arms folded angrily across her chest, listening to Petra—no, *Claudia*, she reminded herself, *Claudia*—as she spoke to her old companion Kaldy. The latter sat on the cold floor cross-legged and listened to her discourse intently, his thin fingers absentmindedly drawing five-pointed stars in the thin film of dust. Claudia was speaking in Italian and Kaldy was responding in Romansch, which allowed both Louisa and Blasko to understand them, though as yet neither had taken part in the conversation.

The woman known to Louisa previously as Petra Loewenstein and known to her now as Claudia Procula, the onetime wife of Pontius Pilate, had entered the cell the previous evening, had screamed at Kaldy for an hour, and then had stormed out. Louisa had spent the entire night and most of the morning trying to find her in the corridors and rooms of the Hulltech Center, knowing that the full moon was still twelve hours away, wanting desperately to talk to her, to question her, to try to understand. Her whip guard had been ordered to keep her in the building, but nothing had been said to him about her freedom of movement within the building, so he made no effort to impede her wanderings. She had been under guard for so long that she was almost able to forget he was with her. Louisa finally returned to Kaldy's cell to tell him that she had been unable to find Claudia. To her great surprise, Claudia was standing in front of Kaldy and Blasko, speaking to her ancient companion in quiet, even, calm tones. Claudia's rage of the previous evening had apparently faded into acceptance. Louisa listened silently, at first fascinated and then horrified and finally infuriated at what she was hearing. The whip locked the door behind her and left the four people alone while he went and sat down at the desk at the end of the corridor.

But they were not four people. They were two people and two werewolves.

"It was rather simple, really," Claudia was saying. "After you and I parted company, I wandered around Central Europe and listened to the things people were talking about in cafés and beer halls and bistros. I realized that you and I had isolated ourselves from the incredible expansion of scientific knowledge which seems to have occurred over the past few centuries."

"And you began to believe that chemistry might provide you with a clue to our condition and give you a means of dying." Kaldy nodded. "I'm impressed, Claudia. That never occurred to me, not once, not at all."

"That's because whenever you read anything, Janos, you read novels and plays and poems, not news and facts," Claudia replied.

He shrugged. "Another of my faults, I suppose. But a few things confuse me. How did you end up in the United States?"

"Oh, Janos, use your common sense!" she replied testily. "I decided to study science. In the years after World War Two, where else would I go? Where were the best universities, the most advanced equipment, the highest technology? I had to come here. And with America taking in so many refugees from Europe in the 1950's, getting in was very easy."

"Makes sense," he muttered, "but how did you manage to fabricate this identity for yourself? I mean, you must have had to forge records and—"

"Not at all," she replied. "There *was* a Petra Loewenstein, and her parents *were* killed by a werewolf."

"By you," he said, as if it were an obvious fact.

"Of course. It took me a few years to find the right family and the right girl, but when I finally did, the plan was a very simple one. I needed a husband and wife with one daughter about five years old and no living relatives, who lived in a small town and kept a regular schedule which included a periodic and predictable absence of the child from the home at night."

Kaldy allowed himself a slight smile. "Rather specific criteria."

"Of necessity, yes, and it wasn't easy to find them, but eventually I found the Loewensteins in New York City. Their daughter, Petra, spent every other Saturday night and Sunday morning at a convent some forty miles from their home. She was in a special choir or some such thing. I waited until her absence from home

corresponded to the night of a full moon, and then went to her parents' home just before sunset and told them that I was from the convent and wanted to discuss Petra's vocal training. They invited me in, of course . . ."

"And when the change came, you killed them both," Kaldy finished for her.

"Causing their daughter to be placed in an orphanage, yes." Claudia paused. "That's what I did to get rid of that fat pig Pratt, by the way. I'd had just about enough of him. I trailed him for a few nights before the full moon, just to see where he'd go, and then just waited nearby until the change came. I couldn't be sure that I'd kill him and not someone else, but inasmuch as I was going to kill someone anyway, I hoped it would be him. Disgusting man," she muttered. "Anyway, for the next twelve years, while the real Petra Loewenstein was growing up, I was working for the Dow Chemical Company. All I did there was clean the floors and wash off the laboratory tables—simple unskilled jobs like that—but by keeping my eyes and ears open and asking questions of some of the more talkative chemists, I was able to absorb quite a bit of knowledge about chemistry."

"Let me anticipate you, Claudia," Kaldy broke in. "When the child Petra was old enough to go to college, you killed her and took her place."

"Yes, but I went through the application and interviewing procedures myself. The child probably wouldn't have gone to college at all. She wasn't particularly intelligent."

"And yet she had the right to live," Louisa said softly.

"Pardon?" Claudia asked.

Louisa looked at her hatefully. "I said that she had the right to live!"

Claudia gazed at the other woman for a few moments, and then, as if Louisa had said nothing at all, she continued, "It was very difficult for me, but I managed to keep from failing too many of the courses. I did quite well in science, of course, but I was an absolute ignoramus when it came to the other disciplines. But I persevered, and eventually I received my degree."

Kaldy frowned. "But why bother with all that, Claudia? If you were learning about these matters at Dow Chemical, why go to all the trouble of obtaining a formal education?"

She leaned forward and looked at him intently. "Because if I

were to have any chance at all of learning how the two of us might be able to die, I'd have to be in a position to conduct my own research, which meant I needed a staff position as a chemist, either with a company or with the government. No one would have allowed a cleaning woman to do research, after all!"

He nodded. "That makes sense. But how did you get involved with this, with Bracher?"

She laughed softly. "It wasn't just this place and these people, Janos. I came to find you."

This at last startled Kaldy. "You . . . you knew I was here?"

"Not precisely," she replied. "I knew you were in the area."

"But how?"

"Well, to begin with, I knew you were in America because I saw you on television."

"What?"

"Sure. I was watching the news on TV during the Mariel boat exodus from Cuba, and they were showing some refugees arriving in Florida. And there you were, large as life, getting off the boat with the others."

Kaldy laughed. "Claudia, that strikes me as very funny for some reason."

"You never did have much of a sense of humor," she said.

"Nor very much to be amused by," he countered. "But go on. Why here, why Hulltech?"

"The computers at Dow have modem interfaces with all the wire services' computers. They have that for economic and technological reasons, but all of the wire services' reports are available. I just loaded instructions for printouts on mutilations, mass murders, and cannibalism. And eventually, there you were, in North Dakota. The newspapers described the condition of the bodies—mutilated, partially eaten—the signs were unmistakable." She laughed grimly. "I know a werewolf attack when I read about one."

"But I hadn't killed anyone here until . . ." He paused. "Yes, of course. That must have been the time Blasko was ill. I killed some young campers that night. Was it about two years ago?"

"Yes."

"That was it, then. So you came to North Dakota. But how did you know I was here at Hulltech?"

"I didn't. I just knew that you were somewhere in North Dakota.

Hull's people are always scouting out talent in the technological divisions of the major corporations, so when I had the chance to come and work here in North Dakota, I took it. And I didn't do it just to find you, by the way," she added. "Genetic chemistry was what I was working on, trying to find out what I am so that I could find a way to die, and Hulltech is a genetic-research center. So I came to work here, and then, when Hull ordered Raymore to assign one of his chemists to a project dealing with lycanthropy . . ."

"Yes," Kaldy said. "You volunteered."

"I more than volunteered. I begged. I was certain that the werewolf was you, Janos, but I kind of hoped it wasn't. I hoped that these people had captured another of our kind so that I could question him."

He smiled with amusement. "And when you learned that I was the subject of these experiments, you tried to hide your identity from me behind that foolish mask?"

She returned his smile sadly. "You recognized me, of course."

"Of course," he replied. "All I could see were your eyes, but I have looked at those eyes for two thousand years."

"Wait, Mr. Kaldy," Louisa said. "Do you mean that you have known all along that Petra . . . I mean, that Claudia . . ."

"I recognized her immediately," he replied.

She gaped at him. "Then why didn't you tell us?"

He shrugged. "Why should I have? You are a pleasant person, Louisa, and I enjoy conversing with you, but I owe you nothing. And I owe your husband and Captain Bracher less than nothing. I have known you for two months, but I have known Claudia for two thousand years, apparently." He paused. "Besides, there was always the remote chance that Claudia might learn something of value to us both."

"But I haven't," Claudia sighed. "Oh, Janos, I was so happy to see you again, but also so disappointed that you were the werewolf they captured. I knew that you wouldn't have any useful information. You've never had anything to say of any use."

He shook his head. "No, and the memories Neville has been able to awaken in me have done nothing but remind me of my own frustrations. He has taken me back two thousand years, Claudia, and I still don't understand."

Her eyes narrowed and grew suddenly cold. "At least I know

for certain now that it was you who cursed me with this living hell!''

He smiled. ''And are you angry at me, Claudia? Do you think I did it intentionally, that I made a rational decision to share my curse with you?''

She stared at him for a few moments; then her eyes softened and she sighed again. ''No, Janos, of course not. We can't help ourselves.'' Claudia heard Louisa mumble something, and she looked once again at her and asked, ''What did you say?''

''I said that you're a liar,'' Louisa spit. ''You can't help yourself! Ha! Who forced you to kill that family and that child? This whole project in this madhouse we're all in has revolved around treating innocent people like laboratory rats! How many people have you killed with your damned injections, tell me that!''

''Try to be logical,'' Claudia said coldly. ''Over the past two thousand years I must have killed tens of thousands of people. If I can find a way to die, my death will prevent me from killing tens of thousands of others over the centuries to come. If I have to kill a few dozen in order to save those tens of thousands, isn't it worth the price? Besides, I have an overriding need—''

''You hypocrite! You're as bad as my husband! He at least has the excuse of cowardice!''

''In stark contrast to your courage, I suppose?'' Louisa flushed and Claudia went on, ''I won't make any excuses for my actions, Louisa. You say that these people had a right to live. Well, I have a right to die!''

''No one has the right to kill innocent people,'' Louisa shouted, ''not you, not Frederick, no one!''

Claudia laughed bitterly and looked away. ''You're an idealist.''

''No, I am a Christian,'' she shot back. ''But Christian, Jew, or Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu or . . . or . . . or anything else, the basic moral teaching is always the same. One must accept one's own death rather than allow the innocent to perish!''

''Keep your sermons for your husband,'' she said wearily. ''I don't have any use for them.''

''My husband? That weak, hopeless creature?'' Louisa grunted with disgust.

''It's a good thing you don't have any affection for him,'' Claudia said. ''Bracher plans to kill him.''

Louisa was silent for a few moments and then said, "Then it is justice, isn't it? A minister of God who puts his own survival above his duty to righteousness deserves to be consumed by the evil thing he serves!"

Claudia and Louisa were too busy arguing with each other to notice Janos Kaldy frown and stop the drawing movement of his fingers as he heard Louisa's words. Blasko saw, however, and watched his friend closely. Something, the old Gypsy realized, was amiss.

"My goodness!" Claudia observed, her voice laced with sarcasm. "Aren't you the little saint!"

"All I am is an honest woman," Louisa shouted back. "If it were my choice to make, I'd choose death before I would choose murder!"

"Well," Claudia said casually, "you're probably going to have the opportunity to make that choice. Frederick is going to kill you too." Louisa blanched, and her lips began to tremble, but the angry fire in her eyes did not fade. "You might try to talk him out of it, of course, by representing yourself to him as a loyal white who has finally seen the error of her ways." She smiled. "You'd probably make a very convincing racist fanatic, Louisa."

"Never!" she screamed. "I've been weak and frightened, I know that, and I'm ashamed of myself for it. But the Lord Jesus Christ died for me! How could I cling to my life by denying the truth which gives *meaning* to my life?"

Kaldy's head snapped up and he stared off into the distance, his face suffused with astonishment and shock and pain. Blasko leaned over and placed his hand on Kaldy's shoulder. "Janos? Is something wrong?" Kaldy did not reply. His already pale and wan face lost what color it had, and his body began to tremble.

"And how do you know what Frederick intends to do with John and me?" Louisa asked angrily. "Are you a psychic as well as a murderer?"

"Not at all," Claudia replied calmly. "He and I have become . . . well, physically intimate."

This took a few moments to register. "What?"

"Yes, just before I came down here earlier, just before he left for the training compound at Red Creek. He is enough of a gentleman—"

"A gentleman! Frederick?"

"—to engage in conversation with a woman after the completion of the act. He told me all about it. You, Louisa, will just be shot, but your husband will serve as food for Frederick's werewolves."

"I don't believe you!"

She shrugged. "Up to you. It's all the same to me."

"And why in God's name would you make love to Frederick? I've seen the way you look at him. You hate him!"

"I need him," she replied. "All he really cares about is creating more werewolves. I have to learn how to *kill* werewolves, how to kill myself, and for that I need research facilities, and to get them, I need him."

Louisa's eyes blazed with anger and disgust. "So you're a whore as well!"

Claudia laughed bitterly. "Am I supposed to be offended, Louisa? I've spent two thousand years in a permanent state of living damnation, and now I'm supposed to be upset by your insults?"

"If you ever die, God will damn you to hell!" she screamed.

Claudia shook her head. "There is no God, you fool. You heard what Janos said. I was a priestess of the mysteries of Ahura Mazda, a follower of Zoroaster. Did Ahura Mazda save me from this fate? Did your God save your precious Jesus from his death at the hands of my husband? The world has been a slaughterhouse since the beginning of time. And where has your God been?"

"Perhaps God has been testing mankind, perhaps he'll bring some good out of all this madness, perhaps all of the suffering will . . . I don't know!" she shouted. "I can't see into the mind of God! And the scripture tells us that the crucifixion was part of God's plan for the salvation of mankind!"

"Yes, sure!" Claudia said. "A part which apparently I could have aborted, if I'd allowed my husband to sacrifice my life to his own ambitions instead of sacrificing Jesus to the mob."

"The death on the cross was necessary," Louisa insisted. "You couldn't have prevented it."

"Maybe not," Claudia replied. "But I could have sought to save his life by surrendering my own."

Janos Kaldy shrieked.

Louisa and Claudia jumped back, startled by the sudden scream, and Blasko grabbed Kaldy in his arms and cried, "Janos! What is it? What is wrong?"

Kaldy pushed the old Gypsy away and fell onto his side, screaming. "No . . . no . . . stop . . . too fast.. . . too fast!" He grabbed his head between his hands and began to beat it on the hard floor of the cell, his action wiping away the dozens of small five-pointed stars he had traced in the dust.

Louisa put her hand to her mouth and asked Blasko, "Is it . . . is it the change?"

Blasko looked up at the sunlight streaming through the window. "It cannot be. It cannot be. The change will not happen until tonight." He looked back at Kaldy. "Janos, please tell me what is wrong!"

"*Stop* . . ." Kaldy shrieked as he pounded his head against the floor. "*Stop! Stop! Too fast!*"

"I'll get the guard," Louisa said. "I think he needs a doctor . . ." She turned to go to the door of the cell.

"Don't be a fool," Claudia snapped, grabbing Louisa by the arm and throwing her roughly backward, and then turning to Kaldy. "Janos, what is happening to you? Janos, answer me!"

"*Too fast!*" he screamed again, leaping to his feet and throwing himself headfirst at the wall. "*Too fast! Stop!*"

"Janos, answer me!" Claudia repeated. "What is wrong with you?"

Kaldy's eyes opened and he stared madly at Claudia, shaking violently, frothy saliva dripping from his shuddering mouth. He seemed frozen in the midst of a spasm of rending, excruciating agony, his body tensed and shaking so fast that it seemed almost to shimmer; and then he rolled over onto his back and released a long, deep breath. He lay still and silent, his staring eyes now fixed on the ceiling of the cell. Blasko, Louisa, and Claudia stood around him, watching and waiting, the Gypsy and the American frightened and concerned, and the other werewolf staring at him, cold, intense, irrationally hopeful.

A few long, tense minutes passed.

And then Janos Kaldy smiled.

Louisa and Blasko looked at each other in confused incomprehension. Claudia continued to stare down at Kaldy, and her eyebrows rose as he began to laugh very softly. His laughter grew

louder and grew frenzied, and then he jumped to his feet and began to dance around the cell, screaming, "*Yes! Yes! Yes!*"

"Janos!" Claudia shouted over his joyous cries. "What's happening to you? Tell me, Janos, talk to me!" He grabbed her by the shoulders and began to spin her around with him, forcing her to join him in his mad dance. She threw his hands from her angrily and shouted, "Damnation, Janos, what's happening to you?"

He spoke through his uncontrollable laughter. "Poor Dr. Neville! One more layer to strip away and he would have known everything! One more layer!" And his laughter echoed madly from the stone walls.

"He would have known everything . . . ?" Claudia began, and then stopped, her eyes widening. She grabbed his hands, stopping his dervishlike whirling, and screamed at him, "Do you remember? Janos, *do you remember*?"

"Everything, everything, everything!" He laughed. "I remember everything, everything, everything! Neville took me back thousands of years into my own forgotten memories, and it was there, right there, the answer, the final memory was right there, right below the surface of my consciousness, just waiting to be exposed to the light of living thought, and the two of you—you, Louisa, you, Claudia—tore away the veil, you tore away the veil!" His laughter again overwhelmed him and he began once more to dance around the cell.

Louisa kept her distance from him, recoiled from his mad gyrations, fearing that he had lost his mind. "What are you talking about, Mr. Kaldy? I don't understand—"

"Of course you don't understand!" he laughed. "When it happened to Claudia, she didn't understand. When it happened to me, I didn't understand! But now I remember, now I know, now I see, and I understand, I understand!"

"Janos, stop it!" Claudia screamed. "Just tell me if we can die! Janos, tell me if we can die!"

"Yes, yes, we can die!" he laughed. "We could have died whenever we wished, but we didn't understand, we just didn't understand. But now I understand, Claudia, now I know why I shared my plague with you, now I know why I carried this plague in the first place. It has taken three thousand years and sixty thousand full moons and a hundred thousand murders, but at last I understand!"

"Whenever we wished!" Claudia exclaimed. "Whenever we wished! Janos, I have wanted to die ever since that first night in Jerusalem—"

"Yes, yes," he shouted, "but you didn't understand, Claudia, you didn't understand!" He stopped his whirling and took her hands in his, pulling her down with him as he fell sitting to the floor. "Now, listen carefully, Claudia, for this is your salvation." He looked up at Blasko and Louisa. "And this may be the key to your freedom, old friend, and for you, Louisa, a chance to give substance to all your fine words!"

Louisa sat down beside Claudia, and Blasko sat down beside Kaldy, who looked at each of them and smiled. Then he took a deep breath and said, "Three thousand years ago, in Persia, there lived a man named Dzardrusha, a man whom the Greeks called Zoroaster. . . ."

Kaldy's voice was quiet and melodious as he began to relate his newly recovered memories. Louisa, Blasko, and Claudia listened raptly as the ancient werewolf told them a tale of devotion and apostasy, a tale of the bridge between earth and heaven, a tale of a descent into hell.

18

For those who have no system for marking the succession of years, the past is limited to the memory of the eldest available mind; and when that mind dies and takes its memories with it into the dark mystery of the grave, then the past fades into legend and from legend it fades into myth and from myth it fades into nothingness. The people of Chorasmia, in the sweeping uplands of what would one day be called northeastern Iran, had no method of designating the years save the generally understood references to this particular famine or that particular drought, this invasion or that plague, this winter of bitter snow or that spring of destructive floods. If anyone were to have asked them what the year was, they might have said that it was the thirtieth year of the reign of their good King Vishtaspa, or that it had been twenty years since Vishtaspa first heard the words of the Prophet Dzardrusha, twenty years since their king had bowed his head and bent his knee and proclaimed that Ahura Mazda, the god of the prophet Dzardrusha, was the only God, the master, creator, sustainer, and emperor of the universe.

The people of Chorasmia had no event in the past upon which to fix the title of "Year One," no birth of Christ, no founding of their capital city, no flight to Medina. They did not know, and had they known, would not have understood, that two hundred and fifty years had yet to pass before the beginning of the first Olympiad of the Greeks, or that two hundred and seventy-three years remained before the founding of the little shepherd village which would one day be called the city of Rome. They did not know that only a century was to pass before the Israelite king Solomon was to erect a temple to the God of his fathers, or that over a thousand years would pass before that temple was to suffer its third and final destruction. They did not know that one thousand and twenty-six years separated them from the cosmic wonder that

burned bright over Bethlehem, or that more than sixteen centuries separated them from the midnight escape from Mecca.

The people of Chorasmia knew none of these things, for they could not part the veil of mystery which divides the present from the future. They knew not the names of any gods but their own, and as for history and prophecy, they knew nothing at all.

But Dzardrusha knew all. He knew that only One Being ruled over the universe, and he knew that this One Being revealed himself to man in many ways, in many lands, at many times, by many names. He knew that Ahura, El Shaddai, Allah, Yahweh, Aton, and a hundred other names which were spoken by human lips all referred to the same incomprehensible, omnipotent, eternal, omniscient Being which had called to him forty years before, the same Being which had made itself known to him as Ahura Mazda, "the Wise Lord," the same Being which had sent him out to proclaim the truth to the people of the Aryanavayu, the land of the Aryans, Arania, Iran.

Dzardrusha knew all because the Great God Ahura Mazda had revealed all to him. And as he neared now his seventieth year, he knew that soon he would pass from this world and stand at last before the Great God upon the Bridge of the Separator, from whence he would pass into the Abode of Truth, where he would dwell for all eternity. The prophet knew that his remaining days would be few, but he had no fear that his words would be lost or that the pure worship he had instituted would cease. He had been teaching for forty years, building fire temples, training priests, and initiating the very best of them into the deeper mysteries Ahura Mazda had made known to him.

As Dzardrusha looked into the faces of the three bright, clear, eager young priests who stood before him, he reflected that these three young men might well be the last priests he would ever initiate. He was old and feeble and ill, and the priests of the old religion, the daeva-worshiping Karpans, were eager for his death, so eager that he suspected they might be conspiring with the barbaric nomads on the northern border. He did not fear death at the hands of these Turanian bandits, nor did he fear the threats and the hatred of the Karpans, for Dzardrusha did not fear death. He who placed his soul into the hands of the Great God Ahura Mazda needed fear nothing.

"You three are the hope of the people," he said to the young men in his soft, aged voice. "You are the sons of the noblest clan of the Aryanavayu, the sons of the Magaya, and when I have left this world and gone to my rest in the bosom of Ahura, you will keep alive the sacred fire of truth." The three young men bowed their heads to signify their unworthiness to accept so profound a charge. "I have known each one of you since the day of your birth, and your fathers before you," Dzardrusha went on. "To you I shall reveal all mysteries and all knowledge, and these sacred words you shall keep hidden in your hearts all your lives, entrusting them to none but those whom you in your turn appoint to succeed you."

The old prophet rose from his large thronelike chair, took two burning torches from the wall, and gestured for the three young men to follow him. They had been standing before him in his audience room, the largest room in the inner recesses of the marble fire temple in the ancient city of Balkh, and they now walked slowly behind the old prophet as he made his way through the secret passageway in the wall behind his throne, the passageway which led down far beneath the surface of the earth to the secret inner temple where burned the purest of sacred fires upon the holiest of altars. None of the three young men had ever seen this most sacred spot, though they had of course heard of it; and by taking them with him unto the Altar of Burning Truth, Dzardrusha was demonstrating his trust in them, for it was in the fire room far beneath the earth that Dzardrusha kept the written record of the revelation of Ahura Mazda, a written record he guarded with his life.

Downward they walked through the dark corridors, the only light being the flickering torches the prophet held aloft before them, until at last they entered a large subterranean chamber. They heard a soft, low, whistling sound as the hidden conduits which reached from the chamber upward to the surface sucked in the air from above, the air necessary for the life of the sacred flame.

At one end of the chamber stood a high marble altar, and in the center of the altar there burned the sacred flame itself. The three young men prostrated themselves, and the prophet said, "Arise, Magaya, and face me, for now will the mysteries of Ahura be revealed unto you."

The young men returned to their feet, and each looked about the room in respectful awe. Carved deep upon the walls was a series of symbols unknown to them, a series of circles containing dots and lines. They turned to the prophet and stood in silence, waiting for him to speak.

When he spoke, he began with a catechism, a series of questions and answers well-known to all priests of the Great God. He turned to the first young man and said, "Jamnaspa, son of Ardishir, answer me in truth."

"I answer in truth, O Beloved of Ahura," the young man replied.

"What is the duty of man, Jamnaspa?"

"The duty of man, O Destroyer of the Daevas, is to serve the Great God Ahura Mazda and to battle Angra Mainyu, the Spirit of the Lie."

"And how does a man serve the Great God Ahura Mazda, Jamnaspa, son of Ardishir?"

"By living righteousness and drinking righteousness and breathing righteousness and being righteousness, O Father of Our Hope."

Dzardrusha turned to the second young man. "Hystaspes, son of Frashaostra, answer me in truth."

"I answer in truth, O Keeper of the Sacred Flame."

"What is the reward of righteousness, Hystaspes?"

"The reward of righteousness, O Teacher of Mysteries, is eternity in the Abode of Truth, where the angels of Ahura and the souls of the saved rejoice and sing praises to the Wise Lord."

"And what is the reward for evil?"

"The reward for evil, O Guardian of Those Who Struggle, is to be cast from the Bridge of the Separator on the last day, and to suffer throughout all eternity in the House of the Lie."

The prophet looked at the third young man. "Isfendir, son of Kuriash, answer me in truth."

"I answer in truth, O Son of Eternal Wisdom."

"What is the universe, Isfendir?"

"The universe, O Master of All Knowledge, is a vast battlefield upon which is waged the war between Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu, between wisdom and ignorance, between order and chaos, between kindness and brutality, between the soul of man and the spirit of the beast."

"And what is the predestined end of this battle?"

"All which is evil will be overthrown by all which is good, O Voice of the Great God. All lies will burn in the heat of truth, and all which is darkness will be illuminated by the light of the sacred flames of Ahura Mazda."

Dzardrusha looked at the three young men and asked, "And what is the sacred duty of the priesthood of Ahura Mazda, sons of the Magaya?"

They answered in unison, completing the oft-repeated ritual. "To conquer the evil within, to battle the evil without."

Dzardrusha smiled, satisfied. "And now, my children, one final question." The three initiates exchanged puzzled looks, for the ritual litany was ended, and no further questions and answers remained. Dzardrusha knew this, understood their confusion, and he said, "Fear not that you will fail to answer correctly, sons of the Magaya, for now I show to you the mysteries of the past and the present and the future." The prophet swept his old stiff arm outward and pointed one thin, gnarled finger at the symbols carved deep into the stone walls. "Behold the revelations of Ahura Mazda!" he whispered.

The three young Magi, Jamnaspa, Hystaspes, and Isfendir, followed the prophet's gesture with their eyes and tried to understand the significance of the seven circles with their lines and dots. They turned back to the prophet, and Jamnaspa said, "Master, your words are a mystery."

"This *is* a mystery, son of Ardishir, the greatest of mysteries," the prophet replied. "Here is my final question, sons of the Magaya: if Ahura Mazda has revealed himself to me alone, must then the other tribes of man suffer in darkness and ignorance? Must they then fall victim to the Master of Lies?"

"But . . . but surely your words will touch their hearts, Master," Isfendir said, "as they have touched the hearts of the people of Chorasmia!"

"If my words were needed, son of Kuriash, perhaps they would," Dzardrusha said quietly. "But my words do not echo in empty solitude, for the Great God reveals Himself to mankind in other tongues and in other lands and by other names. The Great God has spoken in the past and will speak in the future, and he has revealed to me what has been and what will be." The prophet turned his ancient eyes to the carvings on the wall and said,

"Behold the symbols of the prophets of Ahura Mazda! Behold the voice of Ahura as he spoke to men now dead and to men not yet born!"

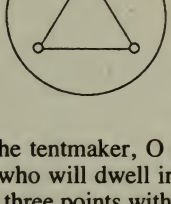
The three young Magi allowed their eyes to drift once again from circle to circle as the prophet said, "In these signs are the revelations, sons of Magaya, the signs of the nameless ancestor, the king, the tentmaker, the carpenter, the shepherd, the merchant, and the camel driver, all who have been or shall be the prophets of the Eternal One."

Isfendir frowned and shook his head. "It is as Jamnaspa has said, Master. I cannot lift the veil of my own weak ignorance."

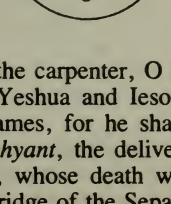
"Ignorance is strong, son of Kuriash," Dzardrusha said, "but ignorance falls before knowledge, and so I shall teach you. Give ear to my words, sons of Magaya." Dzardrusha pointed to the first symbol:

"This is the sign of the ancestor," Dzardrusha said, "whose name is not known. The circle is the universe of eternal truth, whose image is the disk of the sun, the holiest of fires, without beginning and without end, and the one single point is the indivisible essence of Ahura Mazda, Who has always been, Who will always be, within Whom is all, without Whom is nothing." Dzardrusha moved his finger from the first circle to the second:

"This is the second sign, the sign of the king, O sons of Magaya. The line connects two points within the circle of universal truth, as the heat of the sun's fire connects the sun and the earth. This is the sign of the Egyptian king, the fourth Amenhotep, called Akhnaton, who died three hundred and fifty years ago. To this king, Ahura Mazda revealed himself as Aton, the god who can be seen in the energy of the sun, and this king proclaimed the unity of Ahura, and died of sorrow because his people would not accept his words." Dzardrusha moved his finger from the second symbol to the third:



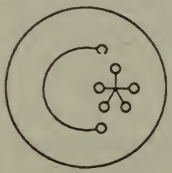
"This is the sign of the tentmaker, O sons of Magaya, whose name will be Saul, and who will dwell in the city of Tarshush in Syria. The lines connect three points within the circle of universal truth, for to Saul will be revealed the threefold manifestations of Ahura Mazda, as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, three eternal subsistences in one essence." The aged prophet moved his finger to the next symbol:



"This is the sign of the carpenter, O sons of Magaya, whose names shall be called Yeshua and Iesous and Iesus and Jesus and a hundred other names, for he shall be the anointed one, whom we call the *Saoshyant*, the deliverer, who will be called Meshiach and Christos, whose death will serve to keep many from falling from the Bridge of the Separator. The lines connect

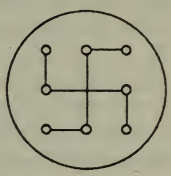
four points within the circle of universal truth, and form the image of the agency of his bitter death. And mark this well, sons of Magaya, and tell these words to all generations of Magaya after you: a great light in the heavens will proclaim the birth of the *Saoshyant,* and when that light appears, you must follow it to the place of his birth and there do homage." The finger moved again:

"This is the sign of the shepherd, O sons of Magaya, whose name is Dawidh, and who is at this very moment a child tending his flock on a hillside far to the south of the Aryanavayu. He will soon become the king of his people, and he will establish his power over all the lands between Egypt and Syria. His son will build a great temple to Ahura Mazda, whom Dawidh calls Yahweh Elohim El Shaddai, and his people shall remain through the thousands of years, proclaiming the majesty of Ahura Mazda in their faithfulness and their suffering and their joy. The lines connect six points in two triangles within the circle of universal truth, for six twos are twelve, and twelve is the number of the tribes of the nation of Dawidh. Ten will perish, but two will survive unto the end of the world." The aged hand swept onward to the next symbol:



"This is the sign of the merchant, O sons of Magaya, the crescent moon and the star. His name will be spoken by millions after the peculiarities of their tongues, as Mohammed and Muhammad and Mahomet and Maomad and Mehmet and Mahmad

and a hundred other ways. He shall lead his people from the worship of demons and stones to the worship of the one God. Seven points within the circle of universal truth rest in his symbol, for two points connect in the crescent and five points connect in the star. He shall proclaim that there is no god but Ahura, and hundreds of millions shall heed his words. There will be great travail among the sons of men, Magayan, for the children of Dawidh and the servants of Yeshua the *Saoshyant* and the followers of Mohammed will hate each other bitterly, not seeing the truth of Ahura Mazda in each other's words." The hand of the prophet moved to the final symbol:



"This is my sign, O sons of Magaya, the sign of the camel driver Dzardrusha, the revelation vouchsafed to the people of the Aryanavayu, the sign of Ahura Mazda as He has revealed Himself to the Aryans. Eight lines connect eight points, and the image is that of endless motion within motionless permanence, even as the sacred fire which we venerate is the ever-moving essence of Being, even as Ahura Mazda is Himself the ultimate essence of Being, the ultimate reality, the final totality, the constant change which never changes, the eternal Becoming which always Is and always Was and shall forever Be."

The three young Magi absorbed the words of Dzardrusha, and then Isfendir said, "But, Master, there is an inconsistency!"

Dzardrusha smiled, pleased at the initiate's perception. "And what is the inconsistency, son of Kuriash?"

"One point is the symbol of the ancestor," Isfendir said. "Two is the symbol of the king, three of the tentmaker, four of the carpenter . . ." He paused. "Six of the shepherd, seven of the merchant, and eight of your sacred self. But what of five? Why is there no sign of five points?"

Dzardrusha gestured at the feet of Isfendir. "Behold," he said. Isfendir, Jamnaspa, and Hystaspes looked down at the stone floor:

The five-pointed star within the circle was carved deep into the stones beneath the feet of the three Magi, and they jumped back as soon as they saw it, fearful lest they defile a sacred symbol. But Dzardrusha raised his hand to calm them, saying, "Be not concerned, sons of the Magaya, for behold the sign of Angra Mainyu, the sign of the Liar, the signature of ultimate evil. The circle is the universe of the eternal Lie, whose image is the disk of the full moon, the mirror image of the sun. See how the five lines connect five points, an endless circuit of meaningless repetition with neither resolution nor symmetry, even as evil and lust and greed and appetite and selfishness and cruelty and deceit turn ever back upon themselves and, unable to devour themselves, devour everything they touch." The voice of the prophet sank to a dark, frightening whisper. "This is the mark of the Beast, sons of Magaya, the Beast which struggles to rule each man's heart. It is the doorway to endless misery, the signature of eternal sorrow, the harbinger of everlasting pain!"

The three Magi stood motionless in uncomfortable silence, gazing down at the symbol of Angra Mainyu. At last Dzardrusha said, "Return now to your temples. Perform the fire purifications, and listen to the words of those who come to you for succor. Think well this night on what you have heard, and return hither tomorrow that we may speak further."

Dzardrusha bowed his head very slightly to the three young Magi as a gesture of dismissal, and they in turn fell to their knees and pressed their foreheads to the floor at his feet. The prophet turned from them and hobbled over to the altar and stood motionless before the sacred flame of Ahura Mazda, gazing into the flickering fire silently. He did not turn back to the three young men as Jamnaspa took one of the two torches and led his fellows from the subterranean chamber.

They began the ascent back to the surface level of the great

Temple at Balkh without speaking at first, but at last Isfendir said, "Truly the eyes of the prophet see everything."

Hystaspes shrugged. "I do not know, Isfendir. What he has told us is hard to believe."

"Surely the prophet would not lie to us!" Jamnaspa said. "He is the chosen one of Ahura Mazda!"

"Yes, and may his name be blessed through all the generations of man," Hystaspes said quickly. "But I cannot understand his meaning, for if Ahura is known to all by other names, how is a man to tell the Great God from a false god?"

"As one tells the living man from the statue carved in stone," Isfendir replied, "for a living god touches us in our hearts and in our minds, while a false god sits in silence and neither listens nor hears nor speaks."

Their conversation continued in this manner during the long walk back up to the audience room, and soon they had exited through the secret doorway in the wall behind the throne of Dzardrusha. Jamnaspa replaced the torch into the large sconce on the wall and then said to Isfendir and Hystaspes, "Let us do as the prophet has instructed us, for I feel the need to meditate upon this before we speak with him again tomorrow."

"Yes," Hystaspes agreed. "Let us eat and then rest and meditate." The three Magi had been given rooms at an inn in Balkh, an inn supported largely by the initiates who spent their time of learning in the great temple. They were by no means the first of the Magaya clan to be so taught by Dzardrusha, and the innkeeper knew well the solitude and service which they would need that night. Hystaspes' words reflected the fact that he was eagerly anticipating the roasted calf they had seen earlier that day, turning on a spit behind the inn.

"I shall remain here to pray," Isfendir said. "You two return to the inn and eat, if you wish."

Jamnaspa repressed a smile, recognizing in Isfendir's response a subtle rebuke of Hystaspes, whose devotion to the pleasures of the flesh was greater than was either common or proper for the priests of Ahura Mazda. Hystaspes flushed slightly and then turned to leave.

Isfendir looked at Jamnaspa, who said, "I shall remain here also, and pray with you." Isfendir smiled.

The two remaining Magi sat on the cool marble floor of the audience room and turned their minds inward, reviewing in their thoughts the words of Dzardrusha. An hour passed in contemplative silence until Jamnaspa whispered, "Isfendir! What is that sound?"

Isfendir frowned and strained his ears to hear. "I do not know . . . footsteps, I think."

"Many footsteps," Jamnaspa said, "and the sound of clanking metal."

"Armor?" Isfendir wondered. "Weapons? In the great Temple itself? Impossible!"

They listened again as the sound grew louder and closer, and then they looked at each other in fright. "Turanians!" Isfendir said.

"Or Karpans!" Jamnaspa said.

They were both correct, for the large wooden door of the audience room was thrown open a moment later and dozens of armored barbarians burst into the room, followed with austere dignity by five of the turbaned, red-robed Karpans, the priests of the old religion, the enemies of Dzardrusha. Isfendir and Jamnaspa jumped to their feet and tried to flee, but two of the Turanians grabbed them and held them fast, laughing at the impotent struggles of the frightened young priests.

The leader of the Karpans walked forward and asked, "Do you know who I am, Magaya?"

"All men know the name of Zuvanosha, priest of the daevas," Isfendir said, his voice trembling.

"Yes," Jamnaspa added, angry through his fear, "even as all men know that the daevas are false gods!"

Zuvanosha glared at Jamnaspa as the Turanian bandits laughed at the remark, and in that glower and in that laughter Isfendir and Jamnaspa heard the sentence of their own deaths. "Surely . . . surely . . . you have no fight with us, lord of the daevas," Isfendir said quickly, "for we are but two young priests of noble lineage, and no danger to you or to your followers."

"No, little Magos," Zuvanosha said, "but all who give themselves to the worship of Ahura Mazda, all who sit at the feet of that evil old man and drink in his words, all who deny the power of the daevas are my enemies."

As several of the Turanians drew their swords, Isfendir began

to whimper and Jamnaspa's knees began to buckle. Zuvanosha held out his hand and one of the Turanians placed a sword hilt into it. The Karpan closed his hand upon the sword and walked slowly over to the two young Magi. He placed the tip of the sword against Jamnaspa's throat and smiled. "But it is true that I have no personal quarrel with you, Magos. I wish to see Dzardrusha. Where is he?"

"Y-you wish to slay him," Jamnaspa stammered.

Zuvanosha shrugged and did not respond to the statement. "Where is Dzardrusha?" he repeated.

Jamnaspa shook his head. "I know not."

Zuvanosha pressed the blade a bit harder against the young man's flesh and repeated for a third time, "Where is Dzardrusha?" Jamnaspa stared at him, defiant and silent, and then the Karpan thrust the blade into the throat of the young Magos. The Turanian released his grip, and Jamnaspa fell to the floor, clutching his slit throat and emitting a sickening gurgling sound as his blood rushed out and covered the marble. Jamnaspa's body shook violently, and then the tremors subsided suddenly. In a few moments he lay motionless in a pool of his own blood, his dead eyes gazing madly and seeing not.

Isfendir felt himself beginning to swoon, but his fear revived him as Zuvanosha turned to him, pressed the bloody blade against his throat, and asked calmly, "Where is Dzardrusha?" Isfendir tried to speak, but no words could break through his terror. Zuvanosha pressed the blade against Isfendir's cold, clammy skin and repeated, "For the last time and for your life, where is Dzardrusha?"

"Below!" Isfendir cried. "He is below, in the most sacred of fire chambers!"

Zuvanosha removed the sword from Isfendir's throat, and the young man's legs gave way. The Turanian who had been confining him was now holding him up as Zuvanosha said, "I see no doorway and no steps in this hall, Magos. Where, then, is the doorway to this fire chamber?"

"Th-there, over there!" Isfendir said. "Behind the throne! A passageway, a secret passageway!"

Zuvanosha grabbed Isfendir by the collar of his robe and pulled him toward the wall. "Guide us, O brave and loyal Magos."

Isfendir felt the tip of a Turanian sword at his back as his

trembling fingers sought out the handhold in the apparently smooth surface of the wall. He pulled the door open and was then pushed into the corridor. The Turanian bandits and their Karpan masters followed behind him, torches held high and weapons drawn.

Down again into the depths of the earth below the great Temple of Balkh, Isfendir went, but not now to learn of the mysteries of Ahura Mazda. He went now in terror and fear and shame, leading the enemies of Truth to murder the prophet of Truth. They descended to the holiest of fire chambers and found the prophet Dzardrusha still standing before the altar, gazing into the flickering flame. Isfendir knew that he should cry out, that he should warn the prophet; but the swords of the Turanians and the fear of death had numbed him into silence, and he stood and watched mutely. Zuvanosha nodded to the Turanians, and one of them began to walk toward the prophet, prepared to thrust his sword into the old man's back.

But then confusion descended as one of the Turanian bandits pulled a knife from his belt and threw it at his comrade. The blade struck him in the back of the neck and sank deep into his flesh, the impact sending him sprawling onto the floor to die. The traitor then raised his sword high above his head and, screaming a battle cry, rushed at Zuvanosha.

The other Turanians seized their traitor and disarmed him easily before he could smite the Karpan, and Zuvanosha's eyes narrowed as he turned to the Turanian and demanded, "Is the word of a Turanian chief meaningless, Nushak? Or has Dzardrusha or King Vishtaspa paid you more gold than we, that I am to be the victim of betrayal?"

The Turanian khan bristled. "If I had betrayed you, Karpan, you would have been dead hours ago." He gestured at the traitor. "This man is no Turanian, but a wandering warrior who has lived with us for many years. I had thought him worthy of trust, for he has joined us in many raids on the villages of Chorasmia." The khan Nushak turned his deadly eyes to gaze upon the traitor and said, "But I was wrong, for he must be a spy sent by Vishtaspa to learn of us. And he shall die the death which treason warrants, tomorrow, in our camp, for all to see."

The turmoil had awakened the prophet Dzardrusha from his reverie, and he now faced the assembly of his enemies. He looked

at the face of Isfendir and shook his head sadly, and then turned to the Karpan. "Zuvanosha, slave of the darkness and leader of the ignorant, wind tightly your turban upon your deathbed, for long is the fall from the Bridge of the Separator to the House of the Lie."

Zuvanosha was still holding the sword that dripped with the blood of Jamnaspa, and as he walked toward Dzardrusha he raised it above his head, saying, "I shall pray that the daevas catch you when you arrive, you old fool." And then he swung the sword around in a vicious arc and severed the head of the prophet.

Zuvanosha stared down at the corpse of his enemy, reveling in the moment of victory and vengeance, and then turned to the Turanian khan. "Kill the Magos, and then let us depart."

"But no, servant of the daevas"—Nushak smiled—"for he is of a noble lineage, is he not? His family will pay much gold for his life."

Zuvanosha shrugged. "As you wish, Nushak. It is of no matter to me."

The Turanians and the Karpans parted company after leaving the great Temple of Balkh, the Karpans returning to their own daeva temples and the bandits returning to their nomad settlement. It took the Turanians three hours on horseback to reach their camp in the wild hill country north of Chorasmia. They had bound both Isfendir and the traitor hand and foot and had slung them over the backs of two horses. Isfendir spent the three hours in prayers of shamed repentance, trying to calm his nerves by telling himself that he would neither fall from the horse and break his neck nor be tortured by the Turanians; and he tried to soothe his conscience by telling himself that Dzardrusha was an old man and would have died soon, even if Zuvanosha had not cut his head from his body. But neither effort was availing, for his fear remained and his shame remained.

When they reached the Turanian camp, a motley nomad village of campfires and yurts, redolent of offal and unwashed people, Isfendir and the traitor were pulled roughly from the backs of the horses and, still bound, were cast into the same yurt to await the morrow. For Isfendir, the sunrise would see a message carried to his clan, to the Magaya. For the traitor, the morrow would see his wrists and ankles and head tired to five horses, which would be whipped to run in different directions. Or so all thought, save

the traitor, who sat in the yurt and stared at Isfendir with an expression of bizarre merriment on his tired face. Isfendir tried not to look at the traitor, but he could not avoid listening as the other man asked, "You are priest?"

Isfendir nodded nervously. "Yes." The man's accent was peculiar and Isfendir could not identify it.

The traitor laughed. "I too am priest. Was priest. No more. Was priest in Egypt, far away, long time ago. Was Aton priest, Pharaoh Akhnaton priest." The man laughed bitterly.

Isfendir could not keep himself from looking over at his fellow prisoner, who sat, bound as he was, upon the earthen floor of the yurt. "You are not a Turanian?"

"No," the traitor replied. "Egyptian. Aton priest, long ago. Horemheb come, Akhnaton killed, old gods return. Aton priest Menereb become Amon priest. Help Horemheb kill Akhnaton, help Horemheb kill Aton priests." The man leaned forward and said earnestly. "You remember, Ahura priest, you remember words of Menereb. Important, important! You remember, Ahura priest!" Isfendir turned his head away and tried to ignore him. The fellow has lost his reason, Isfendir thought to himself.

Soon it was night, and as the campfires of the Turanians grew dim and then went out, the full moon floated in mute majesty in the dome of heaven, bathing the world with its cold light. Isfendir could not sleep, and thus it was that he was awake to hear the traitor scream in pain. He looked over at the other prisoner in the yurt and strained his eyes to see in the dim lunar darkness. Isfendir blinked his eyes, for he reasoned that he could not possibly see what he thought he was seeing.

But his eyes were not deceiving him, and a few moments later, as the Turanians entered the yurt to investigate the screams, Isfendir watched in speechless horror as the werewolf rose to its feet, snarled viciously, and then attacked its erstwhile captors.

The creature carried the battle out of the yurt and into the dark camp. Isfendir struggled against his bonds, trying to free himself and escape before the creature remembered him and returned to the yurt, but the ropes were too thick and the knots were too tight, and he strained his hands impotently against them.

The screams of pain and agony that arose from the nomad village were terrible, and an hour passed before the cries ceased. Isfendir lay shaking upon the dirt floor of the yurt, not knowing what had

transpired without, not daring to roll his body to the doorflap and look out at the now silent camp. And then the yurt itself was lifted high into the air and thrown aside by the werewolf, leaving Isfendir lying upon the open ground in the midst of a hundred shredded human bodies. He whimpered as the creature dropped to its hands and knees and rushed over to him, its jaws dripping with blood and flesh, its talons dark red in the moonlight. Isfendir faced an unspeakably horrible death, and he wept and whimpered and trembled.

But the werewolf did not attack. It knelt over the helpless young Magos and stared at his forehead for a long while. And then, without warning, it snapped its bloody fangs shut on Isfendir's shoulder and bit deeply, crunching bone and muscle and sinew between its powerful jaws. Isfendir screamed in pain and jerked his body in a mad, irrational attempt to free himself from the inhuman vise, and then the creature released him. The werewolf gazed at him for a long moment and then ran off into the darkness.

The next day the Turanian camp was found by the soldiers of King Vishtaspa, who had sought them out to avenge the death of Dzardrusha. They released the wounded young Magos, who told them all that had happened the previous day and night, leaving out his own role in the assassination of the prophet. The soldiers concluded that Ahura Mazda had sent an avenging angel to destroy the Turanians, and this explanation became the official one at the court of King Vishtaspa. The soldiers took Isfendir back to his people, where he was welcomed as a hero and a true servant of the Great God Ahura Mazda, and he accepted the adulation and hid his shame.

Zuvanosha and the other Karpans were seized by the soldiers of King Vishtaspa and were beheaded. Of the Turanians, only one was left alive to be captured and executed. This was the traitor himself, who could have saved his life by saying that he had sought to save Dzardrusha, for Isfendir could have supported his words; but Isfendir could not look upon him, for he knew that this was the creature that had destroyed the Turanians and had attacked him, and he grew faint at the thought of seeing the man again.

Nor did the traitor make any attempt to save his own life. Indeed, when the executioner's blade swung high above his head, the man

laughed and wept with happiness. His head was placed upon a pole and left outside the walls of the city of Balkh, as a lesson and a warning; but the face that gazed down at passersby from the elevated head wore an expression of joy. No one could understand the happiness of the traitor, not King Vishtaspa, not the Magayan priests who now sought to continue the work of the dead prophet, and not Isfendir.

But when one month had passed, and when the full moon rose again in the starry sky of Chorasmia, Isfendir began to understand. As the young priest of Ahura Mazda went out from his people to meditate alone in the hills, seeking somehow to master his shame and guilt, he looked up at the moon and felt a sudden stabbing pain in his stomach. In an instant the pain spread throughout his body as if it were a fire on the grass of the steppes in the driest and hottest of summers. The pain assaulted his bones and his muscles and his hands and his face, and he fell to the ground and screamed. His vision blurred and everything around him became indistinct, but he seemed to see a creature crawling up toward him, a creature such as guarded the gates of the House of the Lie, a fiend filled with lust for blood and violence and murder, a beast which had no reason to its rapacious mind and no thoughts but the thoughts of hatred and anger and cruelty, and when Isfendir realized that this monster was not *approaching* him but rather was *arising* from within his own being, his human mind fled from its own darkness, and he knew and remembered nothing of what next transpired on that fateful night of the full moon.

When he awoke on the morning after his first descent into hell, and he saw the torn, mutilated body of the child that lay beside him, and tasted the blood in his mouth, and picked the strands of human flesh from between his teeth, he realized that the Egyptian priest Menereb had visited a plague upon him, and after much bitter weeping he concluded that death was his only release from the monstrous horror that had arisen from his own soul.

But when he attempted to take his own life, when he cast himself from the highest peak in the hill country of Chorasmia, when he tried to thrust the dagger into his throat, when he drank the poison, when he threw himself before the stampeding cattle, he found that he could not die.

He realized that he had become a slave of Angra Mainyu, a slave of the dark power of the universe, a slave of the dark side of his own tortured soul. He realized that his sin had issued forth not only in a destiny of eternal misery in the House of the Lie, but in a life in death, a life of ceaseless, unending violence, a life of bestial lust and cruelty and bloodshed. And great was the misery of Isfendir, the son of Kuriash, who now had his life safely in his keeping, who now needed not fear death, who now wanted nothing else but the ability to die.

And the months faded into years and the years faded into centuries, and Isfendir wandered the roads of the earth, seeking help, seeking someone, anyone, who could lift the curse from him, who could help him end his life, who could help him to understand what had happened to him. He traveled through the vast steppes of the north and climbed the great mountains of the roof of the world, he sought out the magicians and the priests and the shamans and the prophets of a hundred nations, and he came at last to Babylon in the land of the Chaldeans to seek out the astrologers who were said to possess all wisdom. But they could give him no aid.

And as two centuries faded into three and three centuries faded into four, Isfendir began to forget who he was and from whence he came. His memory of the past grew indistinct and murky, and soon all was confusion and emptiness, and he could no longer remember a time when he was not the slave of the moon.

And there he stayed, in the land of the Chaldeans, devoid of hope, until one day he saw some travelers passing through his village, people whose words sounded familiar and whose dress touched some long-forgotten memory. And he followed after them, followed his distant cousins the Magi of Persia, the Zoroastrian priests who were heeding the ancient injunction of the prophet and were traveling to the birthplace of the Christ.

But the man who now called himself simply Chaldaeus, the Chaldean, did not know that once the prophet had given to him that very same injunction, did not know that he himself was a Magos, a priest of the Great God Ahura Mazda, for his mind was burdened with a life of a thousand years, and the weight of that thousand years had crushed his memory into the darkness.

And thus it was that on that day in Jerusalem a thousand years after the death of the prophet, when he saw the symbol of Angra

Mainyu glowing upon the forehead of Claudia Procula, the same symbol that had once been seen glowing on his own forehead by the apostate Egyptian priest Menereb, the werewolf Isfendir, Ianus Chaldaeus, Janus Chaldian, Janos Kaldy, had absolutely no idea what it was.

19

There was silence in the cell on the third floor of the Hulltech Center in Mannering, and the gray sky of the approaching sunset added an atmosphere of eerie gloom to the words Janos Kaldy had been saying. When he had finished his strange tale, neither Claudia nor Louisa nor Blasko knew quite what to say. Claudia turned away from him and walked off a few feet to gaze at the far wall in pensive melancholy.

At last Blasko said, "Janos, I have listened to your words, but I still do not understand."

Kaldy looked over at Claudia and said softly, "But Claudia understands, don't you, Claudia?"

"Yes," she replied, "I believe I do. But I don't understand why you were there in Jerusalem, on that night of all nights."

"I was there for the same reason that I was in the company of the Turanian traitor a thousand years earlier," he said. "Coincidence. Happenstance. Accident."

Louisa shook herself, for she had grown cold and weak as she listened to Kaldy's newly discovered memories of the past. "I feel the same as Blasko, Mr. Kaldy," she said. "I don't really understand what all this means. I think that we'd all assumed that you were bitten by a werewolf sometime in the past, but . . ."

"Claudia?" Kaldy said. "Would you like to explain it to them?"

"Angra Mainyu," she whispered, her voice distant and contemplative. "The mark of Angra Mainyu, the Spirit of the Lie."

"Yes," Kaldy said, his tone urging her to continue.

"The werewolf . . ." Claudia said softly. "The werewolf . . . Menereb, the apostate Egyptian priest . . . he saw the mark upon your forehead that day in the temple of Zoroaster three thousand

years ago, just like you saw the mark on my forehead at the trial of Christ in Jerusalem a thousand years later."

"Yes," Kaldy said.

She turned to him and sighed. "The mark of Angra Mainyu, the mark of the beast. The mark of the unfaithful servant, the mark of the priest who abandons his god, the mark of the beloved of the higher powers who sacrifices righteousness upon the altar of the flesh, who values life more than faithfulness and truth."

"As I did." Kaldy nodded. "As you did. The prophet taught that life is a battlefield between good and evil, between Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu, between God and Satan, if you wish. It is the duality of the universe which rested at the heart of Dzardrusha's revelation. All men must struggle with the forces of evil, within their own hearts and in the world outside themselves; but to the priest is given a special charge, a heavier burden, a more profound responsibility, for the priest is the mouth of the god and the teacher of the people, and when the priest chooses to save his own life rather than die proclaiming the truth, the example of his weakness and his cowardice and the insufficiency of his faith leads many others with him into the House of the Lie."

Louisa nodded, beginning to understand. "So if you hadn't betrayed Zoroaster, you wouldn't have been marked with the pentagram?"

"I would have been killed by the Karpans, just as Jamnaspa was," Kaldy replied. "I would have died defending the prophet of God."

Louisa turned to Claudia. "But the crucifixion of Christ wasn't something you could have stopped," she said. "Even if you *had* tried to save him by agreeing to Pilate's suggestion, the crucifixion had to happen anyway. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross was preordained."

Claudia shook her head, not looking at Louisa as she replied. "I'm not going to debate theology with you," she said softly.

"Louisa," Kaldy said, "if I hadn't led the Turanians down to the fire chamber, would that have meant that they wouldn't have killed the prophet?"

Louisa thought for a moment. "No, not necessarily," she replied at last. "They could have waited until he came back up through the passageway."

"Precisely. The murder of Dzardrusha and the crucifixion of Jesus weren't events we could have prevented. But the point is that we didn't *try*. Virtue doesn't rest in the victory over evil. It rests in the struggle against it."

Claudia sat down wearily on the cold floor. "And so because we turned from selflessness to selfishness, we were cursed with this plague."

"Yes," Kaldy agreed. "When the full moon rises, we become the embodiments of Angra Mainyu, the embodiments of uncontrollable appetite and violence, creatures of murderous, irrational lust. And when we see the sign of Angra Mainyu on the face of another fallen priest, then the curse drives us to create another like ourselves. And so the cycle of death spins on through the ages."

Claudia turned and faced Kaldy. "So how can we die, Janos? You said that we could die whenever we want to. Well, I want to die. I have wanted to die for longer than my mind can remember. So tell me what I must do in order to be allowed to die."

Janos sidled over to her and took her hands in his. Gazing deeply into her eyes, he said, "All we have to do is that which we should have done in the first place."

She frowned. "Janos, Zoroaster has been dust for thirty centuries. The crucifixion was two thousand years ago. How are we supposed to save them now?"

"This has nothing to do with Dzardrusha or Jesus, Claudia," he replied. "Remember the words of the formula of faith. We must conquer the evil within and battle the evil without."

She did not speak immediately as she struggled to make sense of his response. Then her eyes widened and she shook her head. "No, Janos, no. I can't. I wouldn't know how to begin."

"Janos," Blasko asked, "what are you saying?"

Kaldy looked at his old friend, his keeper, his victim, and he smiled. "Blasko, in all the years you have known me, never once have you asked me what it is like when the change comes upon me."

The old man shook his head. "I did not want to know, Janos."

"But now you shall. You know that there is pain, great pain, horrible, unbearable pain as my body is wrenched and torn and twisted by the spirit of the wolf."

"Yes, that I know from your screams, Janos."

"And you know that my human mind is submerged beneath the bestial fury of the monster."

"Yes. You, Janos Kaldy the man, cease to be."

He shook his head slowly. "No, Blasko, no. I am still there, my mind is still there, buried in the darkness, fleeing from itself, unable to face the horror of the dark side of my own being. For me to confront myself when the moon is full would be to invite a madness, a torture, an agony whose depth no human tongue can describe." He looked again at Claudia. "But that's what we have to do, Claudia. We must conquer the evil within."

She shook her head again, shuddering at the very idea of her human mind alive in the body of the monster. "I can't."

"You must. I must." He paused. "And if we can, then we must battle the evil without."

Claudia seemed to be trembling. "We can't make up for the things we've done, Janos. Evil within us or evil outside us, we can't fight it. It's too late, too late."

"Haven't you been listening?" he asked. "We have to try, Claudia, we have to try, you especially! We aren't innocent, Claudia, neither of us; but you, my old companion, you have killed *without* the beast, you have killed consciously, knowingly, for your own purposes and your own needs. You even more than I must do battle with the dark power, if only because you have served it with such devotion."

No one spoke as Claudia thought long and deeply, and then, swallowing hard, she nodded with sad and sorrowful understanding. "So be it, Janos. So be it."

Kaldy rose to his feet and addressed them all. "It will be night soon, the night of the full moon. The guards will follow their standing orders, and they'll come to chain me up and tie wolfsbane to the chains. Claudia, you must make the guards give you the key to my cell, and after they've left, then you, Louisa, must chain Claudia and bind her with the plant as well and keep the key. When the change comes upon us, we must fight to keep our minds intact and in control; and if we can, then, Louisa, you must release us both."

Louisa's face grew white. "Release you!"

"Yes." He nodded. "You're right to be afraid, because you'll be running a great risk. Even if we can control ourselves, there's

no way of knowing how long the control can be maintained. It may very well happen that we'll lose the slender thread of human consciousness the moment the wolfsbane is removed." He paused. "And then, of course, we would kill you."

Louisa was trembling, but she also felt a strange and welcome sense of purpose. "And if you succeed?"

Kaldy's face was hard and determined. "Then we'll go from this place and battle the evil without."

Louisa nodded. "Whosoever loses his life shall find it," she said softly, and then smiled at Kaldy's quizzical expression. "That's from the Scriptures, Mr. Kaldy. Yes. I'll do what you ask."

"Be certain you understand what I am asking of you," he warned her. "You may die."

She nodded once again. "I've been too afraid of dying, Mr. Kaldy. I've just been too afraid, period. Everyone dies eventually, and if I have to die, at least I can choose to die for something." She paused. "At least I can choose to die a Christian death."

"It is good that you appreciate the risk if we fail," he said. "But, of course, we also may succeed. If all goes well, the two of us will break out of this place. When and if that happens, you must free my old friend Blasko, and escape together."

Louisa shook her head. "That won't be easy to do, Mr. Kaldy. Frederick's people are all over this town and the other towns around here and all over the countryside too. They'll catch us for sure."

Blasko laughed softly. "*Donna* . . ." He smiled. "I have spent my entire life going where I wished to go and avoiding those who did not wish me to. I have survived Hitler and Stalin and Castro. If we can escape from this building, I can see us both safely away from your cousin's friends."

"You'll have no difficulty getting out of the Center, Blasko," Kaldy said. "Claudia and I will . . . how shall I put it . . . escort you."

"If," Claudia said, "if . . ."

"Yes." Kaldy nodded. "If we do not kill you both."

Two whips arrived ten minutes later, removed Blasko to another cell, and bound Janos Kaldy according to their instructions. They saw nothing peculiar about Petra Loewenstein's request that she

be given extra chains, extra wolfsbane, and a key to the cell, for they knew her to be the scientist who was working with their commander on the Lycanthropos Project. They assumed that she wished to examine Kaldy at some point, and so gave her the key, grateful that she would not be bothering them later to come down and unlock the door. It seemed odd to them that their commander's cousin was also remaining behind, but it was not a matter of sufficient importance for them to question it. Besides, she could go nowhere without passing them at the desk outside, so all was as secure as ever.

After the guards left, Claudia unlocked the cell and sat motionless as Louisa wrapped the chains around her and stuffed the links with wolfsbane. Claudia's face was drawn and pale, and her eyes expressed the fear she was feeling at the dread prospect that lay before her that night. Louisa left the cell and locked the door and affixed more wolfsbane to the bars. And then, silently, they waited for the moon.

The sun was fading when Claudia disturbed the silence by saying softly, "Janos?"

"Yes, Claudia," he responded. He was not looking at her as he spoke, nor was she looking at him. Both were gazing out the high window at the darkening sky.

Claudia sighed. "All those years I suspected you. Deep inside, I hated you."

"I know, Claudia."

"And when you were talking about that night . . . that night in Jerusalem . . . oh, Janos, how I hated you when I heard what you were saying."

"I know, Claudia."

"And just now I forgave you."

"Yes. Thank you. And I am sorry, Claudia."

She shook her head. "No, Janos, no. I had no right to be so arrogant, no right to bestow forgiveness. I have nothing to forgive you for. What happened to me was my own fault, no one else's. I abandoned my God, I turned my back on the truth, and I was punished for it. I'm the one who is sorry, Janos. I'm sorry I blamed you for my own sin."

Kaldy was silent for a moment, and then said, "Claudia?"

"Yes?"

"If I were a human being, I think I would be in love with you."

She laughed sadly. "If we were human beings, Janos, we would have been dead for thousands of years."

He looked over at her and smiled. "That's not the point."

She returned his smile and her eyes seemed moist. "I know," she whispered.

And then the demons began to rise up from within them.

Louisa's heart pounded madly in her chest as the screaming began and the power of the wolf overwhelmed the two tortured people. She remembered what she had seen that first night in this very cell two months before, remembered the head of the young whip rolling down the corridor, remembered that she had watched as Kaldy ripped another young man's arm from his body. She watched Janos Kaldy and Claudia Procula as the thick hair sprouted from their flesh and the fangs grew from their mouths and the talons thrust out from their fingers, and she listened as the screams became growls. She leaned back against the wall, ordering herself not to faint.

And then the werewolf that had been Kaldy began to grunt angrily, shaking its head and stamping its paws upon the cold floor. It looked up at the ceiling and wailed, and then grunted and spit and shook its head again. The other werewolf, the one that had been Claudia, began to do the same things, but the wails were louder and her grunts were more liquid. Both of the creatures were shaking violently, the tremors reflecting a massive inner struggle more rending, more painful, more horrible than the monstrous transformation itself.

Both creatures fell to the floor, the chains and the wolfsbane restraining their frenzied writhing. Milky liquid poured from their eyes and blood poured from their maws as they struggled in terrible, hellish agony against the dark side of their own beings, against the beasts within their own souls. The horrible internal battle was waged, the battle of the human mind against the rapacious instinct, the battle of light against darkness, the battle of sanity against madness, of reason against lust, of order against chaos, of Ahura Mazda against Angra Mainyu, of God against Satan, of heaven against hell.

The creature which was Janos Kaldy shut its eyes tightly, as if to marshal its strength for the massive psychic struggle. *Control!* Kaldy ordered himself desperately. *Resist! Remember you are a man!*

A voice seemed to cry out at him from the wilderness within him: *You are a beast!*

I am a man! his wavering human mind insisted.

Maniacal laughter echoed horribly down through the dark corridors of his mind. *A man? You, a man?*

Yes! A man! I am a man! I am not an animal!

Was it a man who left the severed head of Dzardrusha lying upon the floor of the temple, Isfendir, son of Kuriash? When your jaws ripped the throats of children and your claws tore limbs from bodies and your stomach was filled and bloated with human flesh, were you then a man?

I did not do those things! Kaldy's mind cried. *It was the beast, always the beast!*

Was it the beast who led the Karpans to the sanctuary?

Kaldy could not bring himself to agree with the terrible indictment. *I am a man!* he repeated. *A man!*

A beast! the voice countered. *Lover of carrion, flesh eater, blood drinker. Your soul is as black as night, so black that even the sacred fire could never pierce it, so black and so deep with evil that you have been filling it with sin and guilt and shame and death century after century and still it is not full. A beast, Isfendir, a Beast*, the *Beast!*

The werewolf Kaldy struggled to maintain control of his thoughts, and as he did, he realized that the voice he was hearing did not emanate from his mind, but rather attacked it mercilessly from the dark recess of his soul. *Who speaks to me?* he demanded.

You know, Isfendir, the voice replied.

Who speaks! he repeated.

Cruel, bitter laughter assaulted him. *You know, creature of blood, you know. I am he who has been with you and within you for three thousand years. I am your bosom companion, I am your father and I am your son.*

Liar! Kaldy insisted.

Yes, the voice laughed. *Yes, the Liar. I am the Liar. I am he.*

And then Kaldy understood. *Angra Mainyu!*

Angra Mainyu, the voice agreed. *Withdraw, little man, flee from me, and give your body to me to be my instrument, as you have done beneath each full moon for uncounted centuries. For this time is mine.*

The werewolf threw itself against the hard wall of the cell,

trying to direct its mounting rage against the inner demon that tormented it. *I shall not!*

Then madness awaits you, Isfendir. The mind of man cannot dwell in the body of the beast. Save yourself from madness, from the death of the mind. Flee!

My life is madness. Only my death will be sanity.

Flee from me!

I shall not! I shall not! The werewolf tried to scream the words aloud, but the effort produced only an ear-shattering roar that caused Louisa Neville to shrink back from the door of the cell.

So be it, son of Kuriash. Then know me for what I am, and know yourself for what you are, and behold that which no man can behold and yet survive. . . . And a horrible enveloping darkness seemed to billow up from the depths of his being, a darkness which threatened to smother his consciousness and snap the thread that tenuously bound his human mind to the inhuman body that contained it. Wave after wave of raging, murderous lust battered him, and he fell shrieking to the floor of the cell.

I am a man! his mind cried. *I am a man! A man! I am a man, even as Menereb was a man! The Egyptian priest was a man! And he was able to break free of the chains of the Beast!*

You, Isfendir, the mocking voice cried, *you* are *the Beast!*

I am a man! A man! *A MAN!*

The frightful struggle went on and on, and the screams of the tormented werewolves became deafening. And then, after a half-hour had passed, both creatures grew suddenly still, and their rapid breathing calmed, and they stared at each other, snarling softly, exhausted by the ordeal, weakened by the wolfsbane, breathing heavily, trembling from fang to claw.

The werewolf that had been Janos Kaldy hobbled over to the door of the cell, its arms still bound to its sides, its legs still bound together, the wolfsbane on the chains and on the bars still draining it of its strength. It fell forward and its muzzle pressed out slightly between two of the bars. Louisa shook with fright as the werewolf stared at her. She trembled at the sight of the sharp teeth and the yellow eyes and the bristling fur and the moist snout. Her legs trembled and her heart beat like the heart of a hummingbird as the creature stared at her and began to growl.

"Mr. Kaldy?" she whispered. "Do you know who I am? Are you . . . are you in control?"

The werewolf growled louder.

They couldn't do it! she thought to herself in her terror and her fear. They fought against the beast, and they failed. These are monsters in front of me, these are monsters staring at me, monsters, monsters!

And yet, and yet . . .

There was something in the glowing eyes that arrested her, something marginally human, something other than appetite and rage. She took a step forward and gazed into the yellow eyes of the werewolf. The beast returned her gaze, and she could not escape the feeling that a human mind was staring at her from behind those inhuman orbs.

Perhaps I should release them, she thought. Perhaps they are in control of themselves and just can't let me know. And then again, perhaps they're not. I'll probably be killed if I let them out, and it will be a horrible death.

No.

A bullet in the head fired by my cousin, that would be a horrible death.

This would be a good death, a Christian death.

She reached out tentatively toward the bars, but her hand stopped short of grasping the twigs. "Mr. Kaldy," she said softly, "I know that even if you and Claudia are still in control right now, you might turn on me and kill me if I let you out. I'll take the risk, Mr. Kaldy, I will. But you must let me know that it's a risk worth taking. You must let me know if you can still hear me and understand me."

The werewolf tried to speak to her, but it lacked human vocal cords, and its lupine tongue and fanged lips could not adapt themselves to human speech. Louisa stood waiting and listening, smelling the foul odor of the creatures, feeling the yellow eyes bore into her, watching as the saliva dripped from the creature's jaws and splattered onto the stones.

And then at last one audible word rumbled up from the throat of the werewolf.

"*Brrrrraaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaacherrrrrrrrrr!*" it growled.

Louisa Neville hesitated for less than an instant. Then she tore the wolfsbane from the bars and thrust the key into the lock.

20

Frederick Bracher regarded it as fortunate that he had been able to supervise the construction of the training compound at Red Creek, for it had afforded him the opportunity to order whatever supplies he wished, without having to explain to Creighton Hull in any detail what they were for. A certain amount of concrete was needed in any construction, and the fact that he had ordered much more than the plans called for had not been questioned by Hull's auditor. And when he had ordered the construction crew to dig a pit fifty feet deep and fifty feet square and then to line the walls and floor of the pit with cement, it had elicited a few quizzical looks from the workers, but no arguments. All Creighton Hull knew was that he and Bracher had decided to build a training camp for their paramilitary units, a camp that might someday serve as a relocation center for misfits and inferiors. Bracher had not mentioned that, in anticipation of the success of the Lycanthropos Project, he had also ordered the construction of an enormous pen for the first generation of his lycanvolk. He had not known when or if the research of Petra Loewenstein would bear fruit; but he hoped it would, he trusted it would, and so he had made preparations.

Bracher stood on the top of the wall, the edge of which was level with the ground, and looked down at his creatures. He held his arms akimbo as he smiled at them, at the fifteen pairs of burning yellow eyes, at the fifteen sets of snarling fangs, at the thirty taloned claws, and he delighted in the angry, screeching howls that rose up from the large enclosure fifty feet below. One of the creatures, which until sunset had been Dwayne Briggs, scampered about directly below him, looking up now and then and bellowing in hunger and rage.

It had been a bit of a risk, building this holding pen for his

werewolves, for he remembered from Kaldy's escape from the cell at Hulltech that these creatures were capable of prodigious leaps; but, as he had guessed, fifty feet was too high for them to jump to freedom. They could, of course, have boosted each other up against the walls, but he knew that their subhuman minds could not have conceived of such an idea. So now, with the aluminum chain-link ladder piled up and resting on the top of the wall, his creatures could snarl and bark and howl and spit to their hearts' content. They were down in the pit, and there they would stay until sunrise.

Bracher cocked his head slightly as he looked at them, their faces and forms clearly visible in the bright electric light. They aren't quite the same as Kaldy, he mused. It must be because the enzyme was diluted. They aren't as large, not as furry, their muscles aren't as thick, their posture not as bent as the original, from whose saliva the solution had been derived. And, of course, he reminded himself, they can be killed. He smiled again and emitted a short laugh. It isn't easy, but it can be done.

He had been standing there for hours, watching the things that would soon return the world to the white man. Earlier that day he had appointed a new adjutant, a whip named Matt Chambers. Chambers was to take the place of Dwayne Briggs, for Briggs had received a rather unique promotion: he was platoon leader of the first generation of manmade werewolves. Chambers stood silently beside Bracher, waiting for the order that would send him to bring the monsters their food. But Bracher had been so captivated by the incredible sight of fifteen werewolves running about the holding pen that he had allowed the time to pass unnoticed.

At last he turned to Chambers and said, "Their appetites must be pretty healthy by now, don't you think? I'm not being a very good zoo keeper." Chambers smiled at the quip. "Go," Bracher ordered. "Bring our friends their evening meals. And then make a round of the parameters of the compound. Make sure everything is secure and that all the men are at their posts." As Chambers ran off to comply, Bracher looked back down at the creatures. This is so much more entertaining than tying them up and covering them with wolfsbane, he thought. That's what we'll have to do when we actually begin the takeover of the country, of course, but for now, this is better than watching a movie! I have to film

this, maybe tomorrow night. Hull won't get here for another three days, and he just has to see this!

He turned as, a few minutes later, he heard the sound of approaching feet, screams, and weeping. Chambers was leading thirty whips, each pair of whom was dragging one prisoner toward the edge of the pit. Fourteen of the prisoners were dressed in rags and tatters of various kinds. The fifteenth prisoner, the fifteenth sacrificial lamb, wore a clerical collar.

Bracher walked back to the end of the procession and grinned cheerfully at John Neville. "Well, old boy, ready to meet your maker?"

The minister was weeping like a child as he begged, "No, Frederick, please, please, Frederick, please, don't, don't—"

"Oh, John," Bracher said, feigning annoyance, "don't be such a baby!" He leaned forward and sniffed, crinkling his nose. "I do believe that you've soiled yourself, you filthy man!"

"Frederick, please, oh, please don't, Frederick, please don't . . ."

Bracher folded his arms across his chest and pretended to be serious as he asked, "Do you want an opportunity to save yourself, my friend?"

Neville had reached the point at which his reason was deserting him, and instead of responding to the question, he just kept weeping, "Don't, Frederick, please, please . . ."

The captain gestured the two whips away, and as they released their grips on Neville's arms, Bracher put his own around the minister's shoulder amicably. "I tell you what, John. Just because we are family, I'm going to give you a chance to prove your worth."

"Anything, Frederick," he blubbered, wiping his eyes and choking on his own tears and phlegm, "anything, anything, I'll do anything, anything, just don't, please, please don't, please—"

"John!" he snapped, seeming suddenly angry. "Pull yourself together! If you are going to demonstrate your manliness, you're going to have to stop all this childish nonsense!" Neville struggled to establish some control over himself, and Bracher smiled at him and patted his back comfortingly. "Good, good. Now, come with me."

Bracher led Neville toward the front of the line, to the edge of

the pit where two of the young thugs were tightly holding an emaciated black woman in her early twenties. Her eyes were darting madly from side to side, and she was screaming in abject terror. "You have to be strong to be a white man, John," Bracher said. "You have to master your emotions and follow your orders, regardless of what they are. That's the attitude that soon is going to make us once again the rulers of this planet."

"Y-yes . . . yes," Neville agreed, nodding idiotically, "yes, yes . . ."

"I don't think that you have the capacity for that kind of discipline, John. But if you can prove to me that you do, then I'll have to assume that perhaps I've misjudged you."

"Anything, Frederick, anything, anything!"

"Good fellow," he said, smiling again and slapping Neville on the shoulder. He gestured at the woman being held on the edge of the pit. "Push her in."

Neville gaped at the woman as the two whips thrust her at him, and she fell to her knees and wrapped her arms around his legs, screaming, staring up at him with desperate, pleading eyes, hugging his legs tightly as she begged, "No, mister, please, mister, please, please . . ." Her cries were drowned out by an eruption of frenzied howls from the pit.

Neville turned to Bracher and began again to weep. The captain shook his head and said, "Now, don't disappoint me, John, don't embarrass me in front of my men. Go ahead, push her in."

Neville looked back down at the pathetic figure clinging to his legs, and then back up at Bracher. "Frederick, don't, please . . . don't make me . . . don't, please . . ."

Bracher smiled at him. "A simple choice, isn't it, old fellow? My werewolves have to eat. You can be the waiter or you can be the meal. It's up to you."

Neville looked again into the woman's terrified eyes, and then looked down at the snarling, howling creatures fifty feet below. He reached down and put his hands into the woman's armpits and lifted her up. "I'm sorry," he wept in utter misery. "I'm sorry, but I don't have any choice, don't you see? I'm sorry . . . I'm sorry. . . ."

He pushed her away from him and she shrieked as she fell into the jaws of death that opened for her below. He could not bring himself to look into the pit, to see the woman torn to shreds as

the famished werewolves ripped her with fang and claw and forced bloody chunks of her flesh down their gullets.

"A good start, John," Bracher said approvingly, "but you are lacking in enthusiasm, I think." He pretended to think. "Let's try another, shall we?" He nodded to the next pair of guards, and they dragged a frail old Indian man with thin braided white hair to the edge of the pit. The old man squinted myopically but said nothing, did not resist, neither screamed nor begged nor pleaded. It was not that he had resigned himself to death; rather, he knew in his wisdom that his life was at an end, and he had resolved to meet death with dignity and calm.

"Come now, John," Bracher said impatiently. "Don't tell me that a man with as much education as you have is going to let himself fail such an important test. This is an examination, old boy. This is your final exam!"

Neville did not look at the old man's face. He closed his eyes and pushed him into the pit. The subsequent cries of the werewolves were deafening and horrible.

Bracher shook his head. "No, John, I'm sorry. You're just putting on an act, trying to impress me. Your heart just isn't in this." He turned to the whips who had been holding the old man, and was about to order them to toss the minister to his death, when he heard the sound of nearby gunfire. He turned to see Chambers crying, "Captain Bracher! Captain Bracher!" as he came running toward them.

Bracher walked away from the edge of the pit and asked, "What is it, Chambers? What's the matter?"

"Two of the creatures have escaped!" Chambers replied as he reached his leader, breathing heavily and trembling with fear. "They're attacking our men! They're killing our men!"

"That's impossible!" Bracher said. "I've been standing right here watching them—" His words were cut off by the sound of more gunfire, followed by shrieks of pain. He ran toward the sound of the explosions with Chambers and those whips who were not holding prisoners, but they had not run ten yards when two werewolves rounded the corner of the nearest barracks and charged at them. One look told Bracher everything he needed to know, for the creatures running toward them were true werewolves, not the pseudo-lycanthropes he had created; and he knew in an instant who they were, and that they could not be killed.

"Fire on them!" he shouted to the whips, hoping that they could keep the creatures busy while he escaped. "Forget the prisoners! Open fire!"

The young thugs drew their weapons and began to shoot at the creatures, but the werewolves ignored them, ignored the bullets, ignored the gunfire, as they broke through the hastily assembled line of soldiers and ran directly at Frederick Bracher.

Bracher ran back in the direction from which he had come, but the speed of the werewolves was much too great to allow him to distance himself from them. One of the creatures, the larger of the two, tackled him and brought him to the ground and then ran back to attack more of the whips. The smaller werewolf, smaller only when compared with its fellow, for it towered over all the humans who were firing at it, reached down, grabbed Bracher by the throat, and pulled him to his feet. Bracher screamed as his face was drawn close to a monstrosity more horrible than the monstrosities he himself had visited upon so many innocents, as he saw the salivating maw of the werewolf smile at him coldly, cruelly, hatefully. Bracher pounded with his fists and kicked with his feet, but he was powerless against the lupine monolith. The creature's burning yellow eyes seemed almost to dance with wicked glee as it stared at the trembling, terrified man for a brief moment, and then threw Bracher toward the pit with a mighty heave. Bracher screamed again as he sailed over the edge and plummeted into the midst of the ravenous creatures below.

Instinct led him both to thrust his arms forward as the bottom of the pit rushed up at him and to twist his body so as to spin and roll when he hit bottom. His instincts were good, for the fall did not kill him outright; but his left arm broke beneath his own weight, and as he rolled forward, his forehead struck the concrete floor. The impact sent him reeling into unconsciousness, but a strange and unfamiliar jolt of pain roused him almost immediately. He opened his eyes to see one of his creatures sinking its teeth into his leg. Bracher tried to strike out at the creature with his right arm, and his shocked and benumbed mind was confused when he found that he no longer had a right arm. One of the other lycanthropes had torn the arm from its socket and was even now stripping it of flesh. Bracher gazed at the spectacle dumbly for a moment, and then darkness engulfed him as razorlike talons ripped his head from his body.

The smaller werewolf had rejoined the larger, and together they ran through the camp, killing the whips and oddly ignoring the prisoners, who ran screaming out into the darkness of the countryside. The prisoners were unaware that their escape had been one of the intentions of the monsters, which were everywhere slicing closely shaven heads from shoulders, tearing leather-booted legs from bleeding torsos, ripping open throats, gouging red hearts out of shuddering bodies through torn leather jackets.

Neville had fallen to the ground when his captors released their grips on him, and he struggled to rise to his feet through the overwhelming weakness with which his fear had smitten him. He had managed to climb from his back to his knees when the last gunshot sounded and the last human scream echoed through the carnage of the camp, and as he got unsteadily to his feet he saw the werewolves charging in his direction. He screamed when they sprang, but it had not been he who was the target of their attack. One of the werewolves knocked him down as it leapt over him, and the minister rolled over and over uncontrollably, reaching out to grab on to anything, anything at all, that would save him from tumbling over the side into the holding pen of the monsters. His hands found the piled-up chain-link ladder that lay beside the pit, and he clung to it desperately as he fell over the edge. He hung there, unable to climb up and unwilling to climb down, as the two attacking werewolves seemed to fly the fifty feet to the bottom of the pit. Neville almost lost his grip, and the ladder began to unroll through his slippery fingers. He cried and sought to restore his grip, but he had fallen and slid more than half the fifty feet to the concrete floor before he had a handhold adequate to stop his descent.

From his precarious vantage point he watched the battle unfold beneath him. Neville's traumatized mind was not able to employ its faculties to draw the obvious conclusion as to the identities of the two attackers, and so he watched in mute, horrified fascination as the infernal war was fought in the concrete pit, as the two werewolves that had leapt over the edge engaged in a hellish combat with their manmade relatives.

Bracher's werewolves had swarmed over the true werewolves the moment they leapt into the pit, but a few sweeps of the mighty arms were sufficient to disperse the attackers. They seemed confused, startled, and they withdrew to a wary circle around the two

large werewolves, eyeing them with a mad mixture of caution, hatred, and barely restrained blood lust. The creature that had been Kaldy then jumped forward and raked the chest of one of the others with its claws, and found to its surprise that the wound it had inflicted was not fatal. The pseudo-lycanthrope was bleeding severely, but the pain seemed only to increase its anger, and it leapt at its enemy with an ear-piercing shriek of rage. It swept out at the true werewolf's face with its talons and tore an ugly gash in the hairy cheek. The lupine hand struck out again, but it was deflected and then seized in a grip as inhuman as its own but considerably stronger. The two creatures fell to the ground spitting and snarling, each attempting to crush and rip and bite the other, until at last the true werewolf was able to snap its mighty jaws shut on the throat of its enemy and tear it open; but to do so, the creature had to marshal every bit of strength it had, strength such as it had never needed during its three thousand years of earthly purgatory. The victor then rose from the ground and ignored the bleeding body that trembled at its feet in its death throes.

The mind of Janos Kaldy, still present in the body of the monster, still struggling to remain in control, became aware of a stinging pain and an odd liquid warmth beneath the fur on its face. With a slow, deliberate, almost tentative gesture, the werewolf touched its wound with its paw and then stared at the red droplets of blood that lay upon it. I am bleeding, Kaldy realized. I am injured.

I am bleeding! I am injured!

I can die!

The creature that had been Claudia Procula came to the side of her ancient companion and gazed at the wound with wonder and hope. Their eyes met, and each knew that the other understood the significance of the blood freely flowing from the wounded face. They turned to confront the creatures that were still circling cautiously about them. And then Kaldy and Claudia roared, and attacked.

The pseudo-lycanthropes fell back as the werewolves rushed at them, but then they too succumbed to their own murderous rage and engulfed their attackers once again. The two werewolves lashed out with their talons and their teeth, seeking out the throats and chests of their enemies, tasting the hot lupine blood and the

inhuman flesh even as their bodies were raked and stabbed by teeth and talons almost as powerful as their own.

The battle raged for an hour, and the howls and snarls and wails that rose from the pit echoed from the walls and filled the darkness, a din of frenzied screeching that mirrored the eternal cacophony of hell itself, as claw ripped and fang bit and inhuman blood flowed like an infernal river and the mad howls shattered the moonlit sky.

Neville's hands grew weaker and his fingers grew numb, and try as he might, he could not retain his grip on the ladder. He screamed, and then fell into the midst of the madness. He screamed again as he hit the concrete floor feetfirst, and both of his ankles broke with audible cracks, crushed beneath his own weight. He lay crippled and motionless, in terrible pain, as the warfare of monster against monster rocked the very walls of the pit.

He closed his eyes and prayed.

And then, suddenly, the chaotic din ceased, and Neville forced himself to open his eyes and look around him. One of the creatures was crawling slowly toward him in mute agony, one leg missing and the other connected to its torso by a strip of purple flesh. It left a broad swath of blood behind it as it crawled along, its eyes darting about in pain and fear, its shuddering claws reaching out to Neville as it pulled itself across the cold concrete. Then a spasm shook its frame and it fell motionless upon its side. Death brought the creature release from its hellish metamorphosis, and it slowly resumed a recognizable form. It was Briggs.

Everywhere were strewn the dead or dying bodies of the man-made creatures, and in the midst of the slaughter were the two surviving werewolves, the larger one kneeling on the ground and the other lying weakly in its hairy arms, a tableau of human tenderness in the center of a stygian landscape. Neville almost forgot the incredible pain radiating upward from his shattered ankles as his eyes went wide with what he saw happening not five yards away; for one of the creatures, the one whose blood poured from the long gash across its stomach, the one which lay back in the arms of its companion as if it were a perverse lupine Pietà, was slowly changing its shape.

The bright moonlight streamed down and mingled with that of the electric lights, allowing Neville to see clearly as the billowing

hair seemed to be sucked backward into the body, as the fangs withdrew into the jaws, as the talons sank back into the paws, which then became human hands, as the bloody muzzle shrank into a human face.

"Petra," he whispered in awe.

The woman whom he had known as Petra Loewenstein, the woman who was Claudia Procula, the wife of Pontius Pilate and a priestess of Ahura Mazda, looked up into the face of the werewolf cradling her in its arms as if she were its child, and tears of happiness began to stream from her eyes as the blood continued to flow from her wound. No tears fell from the eyes of the monster that embraced her, but its mighty chest heaved with emotion.

"Janos . . ." she murmured. "Janos . . . I am dying . . . I am dying . . ."

Janos? Neville thought. *Kaldy?*

The werewolf leaned forward and pressed its bleeding face against her cheek.

"I am dying, Janos . . . I am dying, Janos . . . I am dying . . ." Claudia's voice grew slurred and indistinct and her eyes glowed ecstatically as she said, "I shall await you . . . I shall await you, Janos . . . on the Bridge of . . . on the Bridge of the Separator. I shall await you, Janos . . . Janos . . ." Her voice faded and her eyes grew white and empty.

Her head fell back and she was still.

The werewolf stared into her dead eyes for a long while and then it placed her cold body gently down upon the concrete floor and looked down at her for what seemed an eternity. Then it raised its face to the moon, and a howl like unto the fiery winds of the underworld burst from its bloody mouth and wafted to the heavens; but it was not a wail of sorrow.

It was a shout of triumph. It was a cry of joy.

The creature turned and walked slowly over to Neville, and the minister, rolling over onto his stomach, tried with pathetic desperation to crawl away from the approaching specter. But the werewolf did not mean to harm him, for it lifted him up, threw him across its shoulder, and carried him upward as it climbed the ladder from the pit. When they had reached the edge of the high wall, the werewolf put Neville down carefully and then turned to leave.

But then it stopped in mid-stride as if something had unex-

pectedly struck its attention. It spun around, jumping back and landing on the ground beside the crippled minister. The creature brought its face close to that of the man, and then seemed to freeze in place. Neville gazed into the burning yellow eyes, into the glowing inhuman orbs that stared at him from above the bloody snout of the monster, but those eyes did not return his gaze, those eyes did not meet his own.

The werewolf was staring at his forehead.

"K-K-Kaldy?" Neville whispered. "Is it you? Kaldy, is it you? Do you know me, Kaldy?"

The werewolf did not move, did not respond, did nothing at all except stare at the sweaty brow of the minister. And then, with a motion so fast that Neville's eyes could not follow it, the werewolf snapped its jaws shut on his shoulder. The pain tore through his body, the world spun around him, and he was engulfed by darkness.

When Neville awoke, warm sunlight was bathing his face and the songs of the birds were proclaiming the beauty of the morning. He raised himself onto his elbows and looked around at the shredded, gory bodies that lay everywhere in all directions, which were already providing a feast for the crows. His battered consciousness slowly reassembled in his memory the events of the previous night, and he gasped in anticipatory distress as he remembered his broken ankles; but then he tried to wiggle his feet, and they moved without pain. I must not have hurt myself as badly as I thought, he reasoned. He remembered the attack of the creature just before he blacked out, and he cried softly as his hand went to his shoulder; but he saw that the wound was not as severe as it had seemed. Very little dried blood had caked along the gash, and the wound itself seemed already to be healing. It was the horror of the entire night, he told himself. It made everything seem worse than it was.

Neville tried to stand up, and found that he was so weak and dizzy that his first effort sent him pitching forward onto his face. He tried again, more slowly and more carefully, and at last was able to stand erect without swaying. And then, with a rush of elation, he realized.

I am alive! I am alive!

He felt like laughing, but he lacked the strength to do more than smile. He began to walk on his still-unsteady legs back away

from the pit toward the administration building of the now-empty compound. He entered the wooden structure and, finding the office where he and Bracher had met two nights before, walked in and fell down heavily into the chair. He saw a bottle of bourbon on a shelf against the wall, and he grabbed it and poured it greedily down his throat. The fiery liquor warmed him and refreshed him for a moment, and then he felt the bile rise up in his throat and he vomited onto the floor. Well, he thought to himself as he wiped his mouth on his sleeve, what do you expect, after what you've been through? Of course your system is upset and your nerves are shattered.

But you are alive! You are alive!

Now he did laugh, loudly and long. "I told you, Louisa," he said aloud. "I told you." I told you that I would survive, because I am a survivor. And now Frederick is dead, and his creatures are dead, and I am free to go home, free to go anywhere I wish, and do anything I wish, which is all I ever really wanted to do. I have survived it all. I have survived Frederick's whip thugs, I have survived the creatures Frederick created, and I have survived Frederick himself. Why, I even survived being bitten by a . . .

I even survived being bitten by . . .

. . . being bitten by . . .

"No!" he screamed, jumping to his feet and falling back against the wall of the office. *"No!"*

I *did* break my ankles when I fell from the ladder, I know I did! I remember the pain, I heard them snap! But now the bones have knit, the breaks have healed! I felt my bones being crushed between the jaws of the creature, I felt his fangs tearing into my flesh, I remember the pain! But now the wound is closed, the wound is healing!

"No!" he screamed again. "*No!*"

He saw a holstered pistol hanging from a hook on the door, and he ran over and pulled it out. He pointed the weapon at his foot and, closing his eyes and pulling his head back as far as he could away from the weapon, he fired. He heard the explosion, smelled the acrid smoke, and felt a sensation on his foot like unto the impact of a falling acorn. Neville opened his eyes and stared down at the hole in his shoe and at the bit of lead which had flattened against his foot and which now lay on the floor beside it.

And in that instant the future revealed itself to him, as if the curtain had just been raised on the first act of an eternal tragic drama. He saw himself wandering the earth as Kaldy had done, wandering from land to land, from people to people, watching civilizations in which he had no part rise and fall around him, wandering through the hundreds of years and the thousands of years, with no home, no family, no peace, no rest, a slave to the cycles of the moon, a slave to the spirit of the beast. He saw himself forgetting who he was, forgetting his own name, forgetting everything, becoming in the end a faceless, nameless, emotionless engine of death . . .

. . . of death . . .

Death!

There was no salvation save in death.

There was no redemption save in death.

Life was all he had wanted, life was all he had needed, life was all he had desired.

All he desired now was death.

Neville placed the barrel of the pistol into his mouth and fired it again and again. The bullets rattled around his teeth harmlessly until he spit the hot bits of lead out and they clattered onto the floor.

He tried to cry, but he had no tears, for a werewolf does not weep.

He tried to pray, but he had no words, for God's ear is deaf to hell.

He had the one thing which, in the final analysis, he had always wanted.

He had life.

He had nothing.

Neville burst from the building and ran from the camp out into the still, peaceful morning. "Kaldy!" he screamed madly at the top of his lungs. "Kaldy! KALDY! *KALDY*!"

21

The air was cold but bracing, and Louisa Neville pulled the ribbon from her long blond hair, letting it fall freely so that the mountain breeze could dance through it. She sighed slightly as she gazed out over the green valley and the small storybook New England village where she and the old Gypsy had spent the past year. Blasko lay nearby on his back, his hands folded behind his head, softly whistling one of the melancholy melodies of his people.

They were two thousand long miles from North Dakota, and it all seemed a universe away. Hulltech, neo-Nazis, Frederick, whips, experiments, werewolves—all seemed now nothing more than a bad dream. She shuddered, not from the chill in the air but from the memories.

She had gone to the FBI as soon as she could, as soon as she and Blasko were far away from Mannering, far away from North Dakota, far enough away to be certain that they were not being trailed, far enough away for the bright Illinois sun to dispel the memory of the gloom and horror of the moonlit Dakota night. Blasko, still wanted by the authorities for the murders his old friend Kaldy had committed, had been understandably reluctant to go with her. She had not needed him to, nor, considering what little help they could give, did she really feel that she needed the FBI either.

Yes, the agent had said, they knew that Creighton Hull was involved with right-wing radical groups; no, they hadn't known what was going on at Hulltech, but they certainly would look into it; yes, Frederick Bracher was wanted by the government; no, they hadn't known about his connection with Hull, but they certainly would look into it; yes, they'd keep an eye on Hull from this point on; no, he wasn't likely to be arrested or imprisoned; yes, they were already monitoring the white racist groups around the coun-

try; no, they hadn't known about the training compound up in the hills, but they'd look into it; yes, she'd done the right thing to come to the Bureau; no, they really couldn't give her any protection; perhaps she should relocate on her own, change her name or something . . . and so on and so forth.

Louisa sighed.

She looked over at the Gypsy and asked, "Blasko, would you like some more wine?"

"No, *donna,* thank you," Blasko replied, yawning. "At my age I cannot drink wine the way I used to." He paused and then took the glass from its place on the fresh new grass of springtime. "Well, perhaps just a bit more."

Louisa laughed and poured the crisp white wine into his glass, and then poured some into her own. Despite everything that had happened, or perhaps because of it, she relished each and every day, but none more than those days when she did not have to attend to the tables and the linen and the dishes at the small inn. It was good work and it was honest work, but it was also hard work, and she sometimes wondered if she would trade places with her earlier self if she had the chance. And then she would think about John and Frederick, about Kaldy and Claudia, about the filthy experiments and the poor murdered people, about the mad dreams of that small but lethal handful of madmen. And she knew that her old life had been a purgatory of bitterness and shame and sorrow, and she was glad to be rid of it. She would not go back to nursing for many years to come, for to do so would mean to use her own name and her own credentials, and to do that would make her vulnerable to discovery, if any of Frederick's people were searching for her. Better to remain Louise Alsop. Better to work as a waitress and a maid at the small New Hampshire inn.

She sipped the wine and then lay down on the grass beside Blasko, the old man whom she loved as if he were her father, who had taken her by the hand that last night in Mannering and had led her through the dark streets out into the Dakota countryside and the plains and the cities and the highways, until at last they reached Chicago. He had held her when she cried, he had watched over her when she slept, found her food when she hungered, and clothing when she was cold. He had used all of his Gypsy cunning, all of the skills his people had learned from untold centuries of wandering amid hostile populations, to see her safely away from

those madmen who they feared were chasing them. And now, as they pretended that he truly was her elderly father whom she supported and cared for, the role was an easy one for her to play.

And Blasko loved her as if she were his daughter, even to the extent of pretending sometimes that she was his long-dead little Lura grown to womanhood. He knew what courage it had taken, what faith, for her to stay in that corridor before the cell in the Hulltech Center and release the two monsters from their chains. He had seen them and heard them and smelled them as they ripped the door from his cell, and his body had shaken with terror as the werewolves led him and Louisa to freedom, tearing the elevator door from its casing and holding the two humans in their inhuman arms as they shimmied down the cables and then broke through onto the first floor of the Center and began killing the guards at every turn. Louisa was a brave woman and a good woman, and he loved her dearly.

They had no way of knowing what had happened that night, for as soon as they were out of the Center and on the streets of Mannering, the creatures ran off into the darkness, and the two humans themselves began their long, furtive flight. As they sat now in peaceful security on the New Hampshire hillside, Louisa was wondering, as she so often wondered, about Janos and Claudia, about Frederick and John. She shook her head as if to dismiss the pointless speculation. They would never know if the two tortured souls had won release from their suffering, never know if Bracher had at last killed Neville, never know if Bracher himself was living or dead.

But God is gracious, Louisa thought, and all things do indeed work together for good for those who love Him.

"*Donna?*" Blasko asked. "Is something troubling you?"

"No, Blasko, no," she replied. "I was just thinking."

The old man nodded. "About your husband?"

"Yes," she said. "About him and . . . about other things too."

Blasko lighted his pipe, inhaled, and blew some smoke out into the crisp mountain air. "Do not judge him too harshly. We do not know what has become of him, and he may be dead, after all. One must never speak or think ill of the dead."

"I suppose not," she agreed without enthusiasm.

"Besides," Blasko went on, "we must not condemn him for not wanting to die."

As the old Gypsy spoke, Louisa's thoughts drifted back to the Bible, to the story of the resurrection of Lazarus. Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die, Jesus had said. "That wasn't John's problem," Louisa replied sadly. "The problem was that he didn't want to live." Blasko did not understand her words, and so instead of replying, he lay back down on the grass and closed his eyes contentedly. After a few moments Louisa sighed. "Brecht was wrong," she said softly in English, watching the clouds drift lazily above her. "He had the whole thing backwards."

"*Pardona, donna?*" Blasko asked in Romansch.

"I was thinking of a line from a playwright I once read," she replied in Italian. " 'First you have to eat, and then comes morality.' He had it completely backwards. Right and wrong are all that matter. Right and wrong are everything, everything."

Blasko nodded, not wishing to take the time to think about the point. "We have a similar saying, Donna."

"Really? What is it?"

"First comes the whiskey and then comes the stew."

She stared at him for a moment, startled and not knowing if he was serious. Then, as the impish smile danced around the craggy old face, she laughed and hugged him tightly.

Two thousand miles to the west, John Neville was creeping over the rocks and through the brush toward the bonfire up ahead, toward billowing flames and the thin young man who stood before them.

It had taken him nearly a year to find Janos Kaldy. He had used his relationship and association with Frederick Bracher to enlist the aid of Creighton Hull in his search, for the old reactionary, though watched carefully and no longer able to indulge his schemes without detection, was still wealthy, still powerful, still a figure to be reckoned with in radical-right circles; and when Hull learned what had happened that night at the compound, he lent his full support to Neville's search. Neville did not mention the fact that he had been bitten by Kaldy, did not mention the unspeakable things he had done over the past year, did not give Hull any ideas about confining him or using him to continue the research. He wanted Kaldy, and Hull wanted Kaldy, and so Neville was put in charge of the search.

He was given a private office in Hull's corporate offices in Los

Angeles, and reports were sent to him there on a daily basis, reports filled with false leads and dead ends, until at last he received something tantalizingly suggestive. A young man who was known to be a Gypsy had been beaten up by some drunken kids in the small city of Harrington, North Dakota. The investigator's report had recorded that he was taken to a hospital emergency room for treatment and was there interviewed by the police. None of this was unusual or in any way extraordinary; but the police report recorded the victim's name. Neville's hands had trembled when he saw "Janos Kaldy" printed on the page.

Harrington, North Dakota. Thirty miles from Mannering. Eighty miles from what was once the training compound of the now defunct White Homeland Party. True to his old habits, Kaldy had not moved far.

Neville had not notified Hull, for now he no longer needed Hull. He went to Harrington and remained there for weeks and asked questions and looked and watched and waited, and at last he heard mention made of the crazy young Gypsy who was camping out in the scrub.

And thus it was that now he crept stealthily across the arid landscape toward the man he regarded as the author of his misery.

Kaldy was standing on a crag in front of a depression in the dusty ground. In the depression some ten feet below him he had built a bonfire, and he was gazing down at it calmly when Neville jumped him from behind, pushed him onto the ground, and began to throttle him madly. No, Neville told himself, no! You can't kill him! Neither of you can die, neither of you! Question him, question him! He let go of Kaldy's throat and struggled to restrain himself from continuing to indulge in a fit of what he believed would be impotent fury.

Kaldy was wan and thin and ill. His face was covered with scabs and his matted hair was crawling with lice. When he pulled himself to his feet, his legs trembled, and when he smiled, Neville noticed that he was missing some teeth.

Neville stepped back and glowered at him. "Do you know what you've done to me?" he shouted.

Kaldy laughed softly. "A rather silly question under the circumstances, don't you think?"

"I have killed, Kaldy, I have killed!" Neville screamed. "I

have sunk into the darkness and awakened with blood on my hands and human flesh between my teeth! How could you have done this to me! How in God's name could you have done this to me!"

Kaldy shook his head. "I haven't done anything to you, Doctor. You did it all to yourself."

"You bit me, you maniac!"

"Yes," he agreed. "And I am terribly sorry about that."

"Sorry! You're *sorry*!"

"Yes, but I had very little choice in the matter," Kaldy said pensively. "When I saw the sign on your brow, I had to bite you, I simply couldn't stop myself. The urge to inflict the curse upon others may have some divine injunction at its root. I tend to believe that mankind always needs physical expressions of abstract ideas, to give substance to the insubstantial, to give form to the—"

"This isn't some goddamned academic exercise!" Neville shouted. "Kaldy, you did this thing to me, and you have to take it away, take it back, make it stop, make me well!"

Kaldy shook his head sadly. "I can't."

"You must!" he screamed. "You must!"

"I can't," Kaldy repeated. "You have to discover the means of your liberation all by yourself, and it must come from within your own being, not from anything I say to you. True, there are some things I must tell you, so that you can begin to understand. But your salvation can't come from me or from anyone else. It has to come from within your own heart."

Neville's face grew red with rage. "You stand there so smug and so calm and self-confident, knowing that I can't force you to help me, knowing that you can't be hurt and can't die . . . !"

"Ah, but I *can* die, Doctor." Kaldy smiled. "At last, at long last, I can die." He turned and gazed down at the bonfire. "I've spent a year living as a human being again, Dr. Neville, experiencing human life, true human life, for the first time in three thousand years. I've felt cold and hunger and warmth and contentment. I've eaten and I've drunk and I've felt pain and pleasure and all the things I lost so long ago. And now, I think, it is time to make an end." He pointed down at the roaring fire. "In my land and in my faith, fire is sacred, and bodies cannot be burned.

They are left on the tops of towers for the vultures to feast on. But for me, I think that the sanctity of fire must serve to purify me, to be the pathway from here to the Bridge."

"Kaldy," Neville screamed, only half-listening to the young ancient's words, "will you make sense? What the hell are you talking about?"

"This is my funeral pyre, Dr. Neville," Kaldy said softly as he stared into the flames. "I have purified the fire according to the ancient rites of the Zoroastrian faith. And now I shall cast myself upon it, and I shall be free."

"Fire?" Neville asked, his eyes widening and a mad hope surging up in his breast. "Fire? You'll die in the fire?" Kaldy nodded. "We can be killed by fire! We can be killed by fire!" Neville shoved him roughly away and ran toward the edge of the crag.

"No, Doctor, wait! You didn't understand me! I have to explain something to you, I have to tell . . ." Kaldy began, but Neville was not listening. He jumped from the edge and disappeared into a blinding upsurge of flame, which then spit clouds of thick black smoke up into the clear sky.

Kaldy sighed. He knew what was going to happen. The poor tortured creature who was even now feeling the heat of the flames and inhaling the searing smoke would soon lapse into unconsciousness, and his last thoughts before the blackness engulfed him would be that he was dying. But the fire would burn itself out eventually, and he would wake up, his clothing burned away, his body untouched, uninjured, unscarred. Alive. Endlessly, hopelessly, horribly alive. Janos Kaldy shook his head sadly. I do not envy you the next few thousand years, Dr. Neville.

But you must break your own chains, as I have broken mine.

Janos Kaldy walked to the edge of the crag. He spread his arms wide apart and lifted his eyes to the heavens.

"Ahura Mazda," he prayed in the long-dead tongue of ancient Persia, "Great God of all truth, I, Isfendir, the son of Kuriash, most unworthy priest, most pitiable of your children, call upon you now in this, the hour of my departure from this life. I pray that in your infinite mercy you have forgiven me my weakness and my cowardice and my sin. Take me into your arms, O Lord of the Ages. Take me into your arms, and give me rest, and give me peace." And then he said, "And I pray that my great

and good master Dzardrusha be given leave to greet me when I leave this world, and see me safely across the Bridge of the Separator.''

Janos Kaldy, Janus Chaldian, Ianus Chaldaeus, Isfendir the son of Kuriash, closed his eyes and smiled.

And then he fell forward into the flames.

EPILOGUE

It was a quiet, orderly world, as were all the worlds in the Union. People went about their generally happy and fulfilling lives, fearing neither political oppression nor crime nor even the ravages of disease. After the long, arduous struggle upward from the primordial swamp, through the thousands of years of civilization and history, the inevitability of progress had at last overwhelmed the entropic forces of barbarism and ignorance. Mankind had to all intents and purposes at last achieved Utopia. Only old age and death still stood in the way of final perfection; but with the average life span now reaching a century and a half, few people felt cheated by the painless passing from life that awaited them in their hundred and fiftieth year.

It was indeed a quiet, orderly world, a world in which there was no place for murder.

Vargodsia 8701 snapped to attention when the face of his superior materialized without warning on the commscreen that was a permanent fixture of his desk. "Superior?" he asked crisply. Vargodsia 8701 was smiling even though he stood at attention, for his superior was a kind and friendly man, as one had to be in order to rise to so lofty a rank in the Security Division. The military formality was just that, a formality, a heritage from a past age.

His superior smiled back and winked at him before saying, "Rep Karouz Security, 1300 hours. Assist Klejashi 3401."

"Yes, Superior."

"Case spec, cide. Ident spec, none. Note mass and fuel discrepancy, freighter 8857756, arrived 14-36-20, inworld origin."

"Yes, Superior," he acknowledged. "Nonauth trans?"

"Invest. Rep. Out."

"Superior!" Vargodsia 8701 remained at rigid attention until the face on the commscreen faded out, and then he relaxed. He scratched his head through his thick bushy hair and muttered, "Homicide! That's a first on *this* planet!"

As he boarded the surface skimmer and politely asked the driver to take him the seven thousand miles to Karouz City, he reviewed in his mind the orders he had just received. His superior had spoken to him in standard Security Division jargon, but he like everyone else continued to think and speak in the conventional manner most of the time. The specialized, abbreviated language of official directives and reports served as a means of distinguishing one class of government official from another.

In conventional language, his supervisor had told him to go to Karouz City to assist the Security chief there, his old friend Klejashi. A homicide had occurred, and homicide was unheard-of in this age of economic equality, abundant material possessions, powerful mind-altering drugs, and an effective system of education and conditioning.

No identification had as yet been made of the murderer, but the supervisor had mentioned that a freighter, just arrived three days ago from Earth, had used more fuel than its mass would have accounted for. The clear implication was that the freighter had brought to Earth Colony Sirius VI something, or someone, unauthorized to be there. That was a distinct possibility, because in an age when no one broke the few existing laws, no precautions were taken against stowaways.

The seven-thousand-mile journey took just over thirty minutes, and Klejashi was waiting for Vargodsia at the Security dock when the skimmer arrived. Klejashi smiled broadly and held up the palm of his hand as Vargodsia climbed out and approached him. He placed his palm against Klejashi's, a formal gesture acknowledging rank equality, and then said, "Homicide? Are you certain?"

"No doubt," Klejashi replied. "Homicide and possibly cannibalism."

"Cannibalism! Are you joking?"

"I wish I were," Klejashi replied. "We found a young man partially devoured. He hadn't been dead more than four hours."

Vargodsia shook his head. "Fantastic!"

"Yes," Klejashi agreed, turning from the skimmer and walking down the ramp to the corridor of Karouz Security Central. "I've never had experience with homicide, but I remember that you had to deal with a murderer back on Regula VII when we were cadets."

"Yes, but that man had simply forgotten to take his regulator tablets."

"That's still more experience than I've had." Klejashi opened a transport door and Vargodsia preceded him inside. The transport booth sped them toward the center of the building complex as Klejashi went on,"It was easy enough to locate and apprehend him, but—"

"Oh, he's in custody?" Vargodsia asked, just a bit disappointed. He had been hoping to do some detective work. "My supervisor didn't tell me that."

"We just caught him fifteen minutes ago," his friend explained. "We discovered the crime only two hours ago." He paused. "I sent in the request for you right away, because I wanted you to be part of the interrogation when we caught him."

Vargodsia nodded. It was axiomatic that the criminal would be captured. All criminals were captured, all criminals were cured. "Any idea of his reasons for doing this?"

Klejashi shook his head vigorously. "What reason could there be? Other than something like the poor fellow on Regula VII."

"Yes, that's true, that's true," Vargodsia agreed as the transporter came to a stop and they walked out into another corridor.

It had been almost two thousand years since the political and economic union of Earth and her far-flung colonies, and almost a thousand years since crime had all but been eliminated. The causes of crime were simple and few in number—poverty, emotional insecurity, an alienated psyche—and once understood, rational government could do away with the causes. The Security Division concerned itself almost exclusively with resources allocation and, of course, protection against potentially dangerous alien life. An old-fashioned murder was something out of the history books, and though Vargodsia was sorry that no search and chase would be involved, still he was grateful that Klejashi had broken into the boredom of his day-to-day duties by sending for him.

"Here he is," Klejashi said as the door to the interrogation room swished open. "We've asked him only a few questions. No answers worth repeating. See what you can do with him."

The prisoner was sitting in a plush chair in the center of the bare room, and Vargodsia seated himself in another and smiled. "Hello, my brother."

The prisoner was smiling also, but his smile was a sad one. "I never guessed. I never thought of it for a moment. I never looked into it."

Vargodsia's smile seemed fixed on his face, but his eyes showed confusion. "I don't understand you, my brother."

"It shouldn't have happened, not last night. I might have been able to go away, go somewhere isolated, away from people. That's why I came here, that's why I hid on board that freighter, to get away from people."

"But we all need people, my brother," Vargodsia said gently. "Everyone needs people."

"Not the way I need them," the prisoner responded softly.

"And why would anyone want to be a stowaway, when all you have to do is apply for a travel permit or a settlement pass? The colonies are open to all citizens of the Union. You know that, my brother."

"Yes, yes," the prisoner sighed. "I know that. But you have to have a reason for traveling, a reason for settling."

"Well"—Vargodsia laughed in a friendly manner—"I'm sure you *do* have a reason, don't you?"

"Yes. I wanted to get away from people, away from population centers."

"But everyone needs—" Vargodsia began.

"I just didn't research the Sirius colony carefully enough," he went on, ignoring the Security officer's protest. "It just never occurred to me."

"And what is that, my brother?" Vargodsia asked. "What never occurred to you?"

The prisoner laughed, as if amazed by his own lack of foresight. "It never occurred to me that a planet could have five moons."

"Yes, they're lovely, aren't they?" Vargodsia said. "And at least one of them is full every night. It's very pleasant."

"Absolutely delightful," the prisoner muttered.

"And it's good light, too," Vargodsia went on. "With a day half as long as Earth's, it might get pretty gloomy around here without all the moonlight."

"Five moons, and sunset every six hours." The prisoner shook his head sadly. "Idiot, idiot . . . stupid fool . . .!"

Vargodsia paused and then said, "Listen to me, my brother. We know you stowed away on that freighter. That's unauthorized use of Union transportation. We know you don't have permission to be here in the Sirius system. That's unauthorized relocation. We know you killed that poor young man, and we're pretty sure

you also . . .'' He paused again, amazed at his own words. ''. . . also ate parts of his body.'' Vargodsia looked deep into the prisoner's sad, watery eyes. ''You're in deep trouble, my brother, very deep trouble. But we want to help you, not hurt you.''

The prisoner looked up. ''How long until sunset?''

''Oh, about ten minutes.''

He laughed grimly. ''In that case, my brother, you are in a lot more trouble than I am.''

Vargodsia did not know what to make of that comment, so he ignored it and said, ''All we want to do is help you, make you well. So why don't you and I try to be friends, shall we?'' He held out his palm. ''My name is Vargodsia 8701. What's your name?''

John Neville sighed. ''I have absolutely no idea,'' he said.

And then the moons began to rise.

A Special Preview of
BLOOD OF THE IMPALER
by
Jeffrey Sackett

Malcolm Harker hides a dark family secret. He is, in a manner of speaking, the grandson of Vlad the Impaler . . . Dracula. All his life he has fought the dark impulses, but now he has decided to prove his origins once and for all. In the following scene, Malcolm tests his theory about his ability to revive a vampire.

It was all there, just as he had imagined it must be, just as the book had told him it would be. The long strands of brittle yellow hair still clung to the decayed skull of what had once been a beautiful, vibrant young woman. The skeleton was in an advanced state of decomposition, but the bones of the hands still wore the rings and bracelets that had been placed upon them before burial a century before, and the hands still rested folded upon the faded, crumbling, yellowed linen that had been the woman's burial gown.

The skull and the vertebrae were not connected to each other, for the head had been severed from the body. That had not been the cause of death, of course. Malcolm knew how she had died, they both knew who had killed her. The decapitation had occurred after death, was one of the precautions taken by those who loved her, who wished to make certain that her death would be both blessed and final, who had acted, not out of malice, but out of devotion.

The fresh garlic with which they had stuffed her dead mouth had long since rotted away to nothing, but not before it had imparted its pungent aroma to the interior of the coffin. The consecrated communion wafer that her friends had placed upon her stomach had likewise fallen victim to the passage of time. But Malcolm knew that both substances had once been there, both of them, the garlic and the wafer. He knew this as surely as he understood why her decayed skeletal rib cage still held, in the spot beneath which her young heart had once beat, a wooden stake.

"My God!" he said between clenched teeth. "My God, my God! It proves that the story is true."

He gazed back down at the moldy skeleton. Without taking his eyes from it, he reached into the bag and drew forth a whisk broom and a bottle of vinegar. He poured the vinegar freely over the teeth and jaws of the skull so as to wash away any vestigial remains of the garlic, and then he deftly flicked the whisk broom over the faded linen that still encumbered the pelvic bones, thus making certain that no tiny bits of the consecrated wafer remained upon the surface of the funeral gown.

He watched and waited for a few moments as the vinegar dripped down from the teeth and spread out over the bottom of the coffin. Then, slowly and almost reverently, he took the skull in his hands and moved it a few inches downward toward the body, aligning its base with the tip of the spinal column. He paused, breathing heavily. Then he grasped the wooden stake by its protruding end and withdrew it from between the ribs.

He reached into the black bag once again and felt around for a few moments. Then he took out a small penknife. He opened the penknife and made a small incision in his forearm. The blood welled up from the cut, and when it began to flow freely, he leaned his arm into the coffin and allowed the blood to drip onto the teeth of the skull. In a few moments the bones were running with red streams.

He stepped back and wrapped a handkerchief around his small but stinging wound, and then he waited.

Almost imperceptibly at first but then increasingly louder, a hissing sound was coming from the coffin and a fine red mist began seeping up.

Read **Blood of the Impaler,** *on sale now wherever Bantam Books are sold.*

Never Before Published
Special Preview of
the New Novel of Horror by
Jeffrey Sackett

Vernon Sweet has spent his entire long life as Grogo the Goblin, a side show freak. As we see in the following scene, though the time has come for Vernon to retire, Grogo has only just begun.

"Ladies and gentlemen, our last exhibition will shock and disturb many of you. Before we reveal to you the horror which waits behind the curtain . . ." and Appleby gestured to his left, ". . . we want to give the faint-hearted, the very young and the very old, a chance to leave." Of course, no one left the tent. He waited a few moments and then shrugged. "Well, we've warned you. Ladies and gentlemen . . . Grogo the Goblin!"

The curtain parted, and an audible intake of breath came from the audience. After Maharaja and Konga they had expected another cheap excuse for a thrill, not the monstrous deformity which stood before them in the cage.

Vernon Sweet was clad in a simple white gown, a curious hybrid of a hospital dress and a kaftan. The simplicity of his clothing was designed to draw as little attention to itself as possible, so better to accentuate his bizarre and twisted body.

Sweet stood some four and a half feet tall, and his diminutive stature seemed all the smaller for the enormous, round, almost bald head which was perched upon his long thin neck. His shoulders sloped downward because he had no collar bones, which made his arms seem to grow directly from his throat and reach down until his hands were even with the knees of his short legs. His spine was bent in the shape of an upside-down question mark, and thick tufts of dark hair grew upon his large, gnarled feet.

His eyes were small and close together, and his teeth, some of which protruded over his upper lip, were broken, bent, and as yellow as his sallow, wrinkled skin. His mouth

was abnormally wide, his nose sharply pointed, his chin non-existent.

Only his hands seemed properly formed. They were exquisitely beautiful, with thin, delicate, almost artistic fingers, which were scratching spasmodically at his knees as he looked out at the gaping faces.

He was absolutely hideous. The audience was delighted.

Appleby waited for a few moments before continuing to speak. He allowed the eyes of the audience to drink in the living grotesquerie in the cage.

Vernon, my boy, Appleby thought, *I think I'm gonna see some real money in a few weeks, thanks to you.*

"The most re*mark*able circus geek in the world, ladies and gentlemen," he said. "Grogo the Goblin has powers which science itself cannot even begin to understand. Watch him carefully, my friends. You will think your eyes are deceiving you. Stay in your seats, please, during the performance. It's dangerous to get too close to this creature."

A nervous giggle drifted through the small assembly. The people in the audience were neither unsophisticated nor cruel, and each of them felt embarrassed and just a bit guilty at having gawked so unreservedly at "Grogo the Goblin." None of them would have stared callously at a victim of cerebral palsy or paid admission to see someone whose legs had been lost to diabetes; and yet here they were, paying fifty cents for the privilege of staring at a deformed man.

Appleby knew how audiences reacted to freaks, and he measured his words accordingly. One minute, no more, for them to realize what they were looking at; and then, before the shocked and perverse fascination changed to disapproval or disgust—or worse. Then, back to the show. It's all a show, folks, all a game. You don't think he really looks like that, do you . . . ?

"We all know what the geek does, my friends. We all know about the time-honored tradition of people accepting money in exchange for doing outrageously disgusting things. Well, the circus geek is a old member of that unique fraternity. The geek devours live chickens."

Appleby watched as a few women turned to their companions and whispered urgently. He could hear bits of what they were saying. ". . . I'm not going to sit here and . . . We're going home right now, Harry! . . . I think we should call the police and . . . This is the most sickening . . ."

And he could hear bits of the men's responses as well. ". . . Karen, it's all an act . . . You don't think he's actually going to . . . Special effects, just special effects . . . I mean, how realistic was that stupid gorilla girl bit? . . ."

"But Grogo the Goblin," Appleby said loudly, "is, may I say, a unique geek." His booming voice quieted them and focused their attentions back on the stage. "This creature is . . ." and he paused for effect, ". . . a shapechanger!"

"Right, just like Konga," someone in the audience said in a stage whisper.

Appleby pretended to ignore the remark and the ensuing laughter, and the pretense was as calculated as everything else he had said so far that evening. By pretending to ignore the comment, and by making it very clear that he was only pretending, he could give the appearance of an irritation he did not feel.

It was the oldest technique in the side show barker's repertoire. Shock them, offend them, then lull them into security and confidence and let them think they've got the upper hand.

And then clobber them with something incredible and leave them open-mouthed.

"Judge for yourselves, ladies and gentlemen." He turned

to the cage. "Maharaja, if you would do the honors?"

Ashvarinda had ceased whispering to Vernon Sweet, and he now took a small metal cage from the ground behind the large cage in which Sweet was standing. He looked at the chicken in the cage and muttered, "You serve, small life. It is your dharma to die, and your karma to be reborn." As he took the chicken out and pushed it through the bars of the Goblin's cage, Appleby went around the tent and lowered the flames of the lanterns. He then moved to the side of the tent farthest from the cage and stood waiting.

The people in the audience were straining to see as Vernon Sweet picked up the chicken and appraised it for a moment. The chicken clucked and fluttered and scratched at the delicate hands which were holding it fast, and then Sweet brought the chicken's head to his open mouth and tore off its head.

Exclamations of disgust burst from the audience and a few people made motions as if to rise from their seats, but then complete silence descended as Vernon Sweet began slowly to move within the cage. At first his movements were slow, a measured turning from left to right in a full circle; but then his motions grew more rapid and frenzied, a whirling gyration in the center of the cage. The people in the audience gaped as Sweet's body seemed to shrink as it spun about, and they squinted their eyes through the dim lighting and the incense haze as Sweet's sallow skin grew bright yellow, as feathers began to thrust out in all directions from his rapidly diminishing form.

The staring eyes inevitably blinked; and in the center of the geek cage were two birds, two chickens. One was clucking and pecking at the floor. The other was lying dead and decapitated.

"No, Norman, absolutely not!" Ashvarinda said even

more firmly. "Tonight was the last . . . the last trick. Vernon shall never . . ."

"And who the hell do you think you are, his mother?" Norman Appleby demanded, his face growing red. "I can make this guy rich! Who the hell are you to stand between him and money?"

"Or between you and money," he responded icily. "He is not in need of money. Between us we have more than enough for . . ."

"I've been waiting for years for something like this to come along, goddamn it! If he'd'a started doing this trick fifteen years ago, I wouldn't be in the situation I'm . . ." He paused. "Oh, I get it. You found out about Tagliotti, and now you want a piece of the action. Right? Well, that's fair. You must have figured out that trick. Vernon sure couldn't have . . ."

"Norman, the show has closed, Vernon's work has ended. He is over seventy years old, and he has been doing this for forty years. Now he can rest."

Appleby was too self-centered to be able to conceive of altruism in another man's breast. All he could see was vanishing receipts and in his fear for himself he grew furious. "Yeah, sure, right," he spat. "And two months after you two walk out of here I turn on the TV and see you on the Sullivan show, with Tagliotti waving his wand over Vernon while he does his chicken trick and you pick up your percentage! Why, you son of a bitch!"

The nostrils of the aged yogi flared slightly. "You forget yourself, Norman," he said evenly.

"You son of a bitch!" Appleby shouted again and, swinging a closed fist around in a furious arc, struck Ashvarinda in the face, sending him sprawling onto the ground.

A yelp of frightened concern burst from Vernon Sweet

as he rushed to the bars of the cage and wrapped his long fingers around them. "Rinda!" he cried.

Ashvarinda Patanjali struggled to retain his composure as he pulled himself to his feet and wiped a trickle of blood from the corner of his mouth. This is maya, maya, he told himself, the net of sense perception. This man is trapped in the web of illusion, he suffers from the weight of his karmic chains, he . . .

"Get the hell out of here!" Appleby shouted, pushing the Hindu forcefully against the cage.

Though Appleby outweighed him by at least one hundred pounds, Ashvarinda attempted to hold his ground. "Vernon's destiny is not yours to decide, Norman," he said, his voice shaking from the rage he was attempting to suppress. "He must not continue to do this thing. You do not understand what you are . . ."

Unlike Ashvarinda, Appleby made no attempt to restrain his anger. He grabbed the elderly man by the throat and began to choke him, screaming, "You goddamn bush nigger, you thieving—"

"Rinda! Rinda!" Sweet cried again and reached out between the bars with his long thin arms.

Ashvarinda saw the motion and his dark skin paled. "No," he rasped through the choke hold. "Vernon . . . no . . ." He attempted to pull Appleby away from the cage, but the larger man saw this as an attempt to dislodge his grip and so he fell back against the bars, dragging Ashvarinda with him.

Appleby heard Sweet cry, "Rinda," once again, and then another voice, a lower, darker voice, cried, "Rinda!," and then the snarl of an animal barked. Appleby turned to see Vernon Sweet smiling at him through the narrow bars of the cage. Their faces were inches from each other as rows

of narrow dagger-like teeth burst out from between the thin lips of the geek and buried themselves in Appleby's forehead, buzzing as they vibrated and burrowed through the bone into the brain.

"NO, VERNON . . ." Ashvarinda screamed. "*NUHIY YEY NUHIY KUHRO!*" DON'T DO IT!

It was too late. The aged yogi squeezed his eyes tightly shut and prayed, trying to ignore the shrieks of agony and the guttural sounds of pleasure.

A dark and horrible silence descended upon the tent.

At last Ashvarinda Patanjali opened his eyes and looked sadly down at Appleby's corpse as it lay in a pool of blood at the foot of the geek cage. Then he looked up at the Appleby-thing which was standing imperiously within the cage, its balled fists resting upon its hips, the ripped tatters of the now much too small white robe hanging in shreds from his large frame.

"Get me the hell out of here!" the Appleby-thing shouted.

In his previous novels, Jeffrey Sackett has successfully reworked the tales of the evil beasts of myth and legend to bring us terrifying stories of mummies, witches, vampires and werewolves. With his new book, Sackett brings us an unforgettable novel about a demon more malevolent than all of those known to mankind.

Read Jeffrey Sackett's new novel, on sale in the summer of 1990, wherever Bantam Books are sold.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JEFFREY SACKETT was born in Brooklyn in 1949, and counts himself fortunate to have made it home from the hospital unscathed. After studying briefly for the ministry, he chose to pursue an academic career—this being preferable at the time to his alternative, which was a year in the Mekong Delta as a guest of the government.

He obtained graduate degrees in history from Queens College and New York University, and also studied classical Greek, Latin, and several modern languages. Being thus possessed of a vast fund of fascinating but unmarketable information, he became a teacher of history and English, which he has remained until this day.

He explored other career alternatives at various times. He worked for a while as a bank guard (during which time the bank was robbed) and as a finder of missing persons (most of whom had disappeared by choice, and threatened him with all manner of violent reprisals when he found them). He decided that on the whole, teaching was his safest bet.

He has had four novels published by Bantam: *Stolen Souls, Candlemas Eve, Blood of the Impaler* and now *Mark of the Werewolf*. His fifth novel is about, well, goblins, actually, and will be out in summer 1990.

Sackett lives with his wife Paulette, an artist; their daughter Victoria Simonetta, toddler; their dog Paddington, a cocker spaniel; and their lizard Horatio, a seven-foot iguana. Theirs is the only house in the neighborhood with a sign saying Beware of Reptile on the fence.

John Saul is "a writer with the touch for raising gooseflesh."
—Detroit News

John Saul has produced one bestseller after another: masterful tales of terror and psychological suspense. Each of his works is as shocking, as intense and as stunningly real as those that preceded it.

☐ 27261	THE UNLOVED	$4.50
☐ 26657	THE UNWANTED	$4.95
☐ 25864	HELLFIRE	$4.50
☐ 26552	BRAINCHILD	$4.95
☐ 26258	THE GOD PROJECT	$4.95
☐ 26264	NATHANIEL	$4.50

Look for them at your bookstore or use this page to order:

Bantam Books, Dept. JS7, 414 East Golf Road, Des Plaines, IL 60016

Please send me the items I have checked above. I am enclosing $_____ (please add $2.00 to cover postage and handling). Send check or money order, no cash or C.O.D.s please.

Mr/Ms _____

Address _____

City/State _____ Zip _____

JS7–11/89

Please allow four to six weeks for delivery.
Prices and availability subject to change without notice.

EVERLASTING DAMNATION

He is Janos Kaldy…immortal…werewolf. He cannot be killed or wounded—not even by his own desperate hand. Over the long centuries, he has suffered through countless agonizing deaths—bodies torn apart by an insatiable bloodlust beyond his control. And now, a secret band of neofascist terrorists knows that Kaldy holds the key to his eternal curse. The key to their power. The key to an army of monsters: nightmarish man-beasts that can survive dozens of rounds from blazing submachine guns. They will build an army to rule the nation from a throne of hate. Only one condemned werewolf stands in their way….